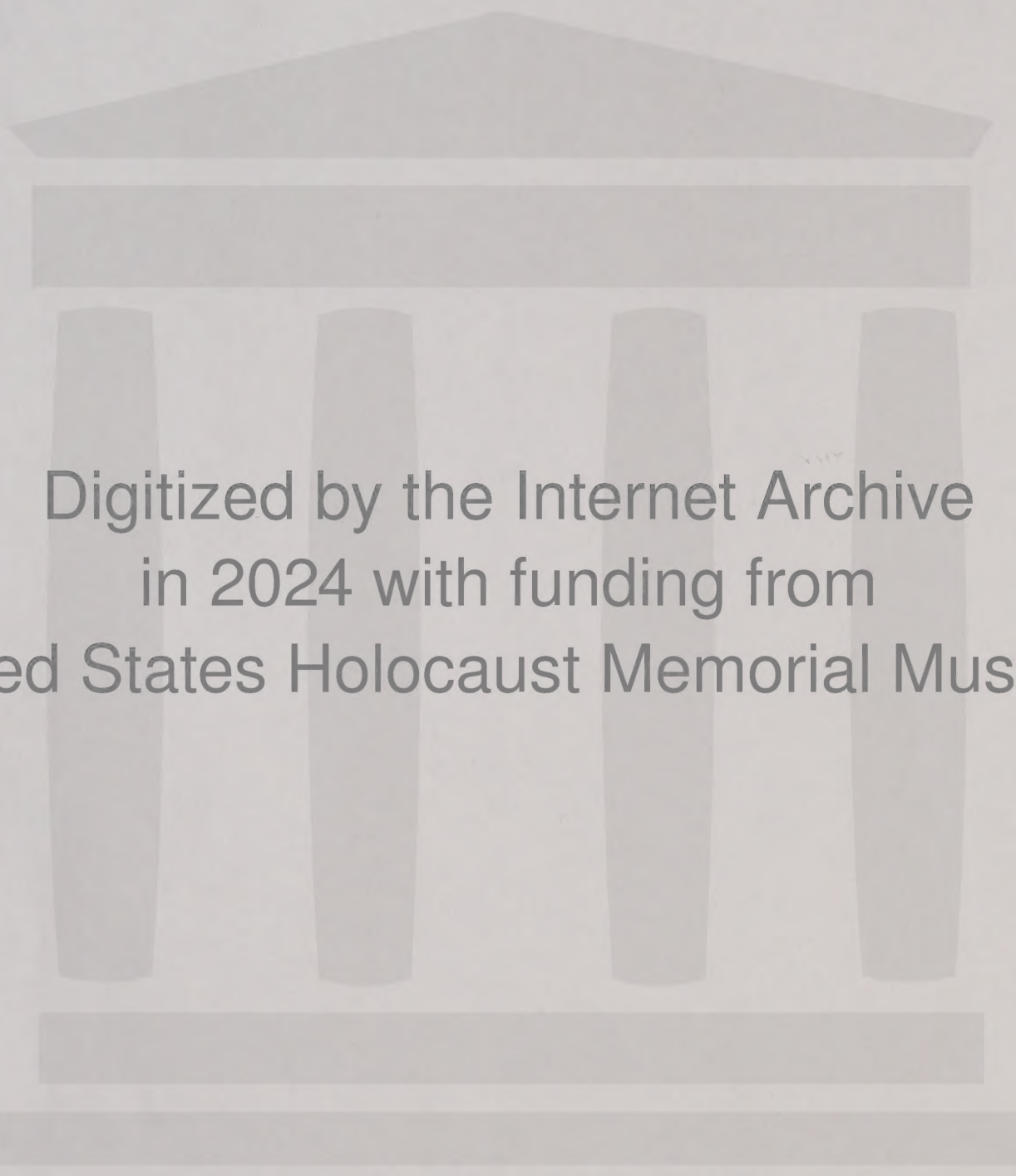




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INTRODUCTION

"I love you!" I cried out sobbing painfully bending over a simple pine coffin." You were my friend, my inspiration, my soul and as well, you were my only true love!" These were the very words I softly whispered to myself as a heavy stream of tears gushed out running down my face incessantly as the shovel was handed over to me to bury my beloved husband's coffin. I lost him.... He was my one and only ,the person I shared everything with; my life, my problems, my happiness and my misfortunes. There was so much that we underwent together. The pain I went through losing my husband was indescribable. I left the cemetery in Sharon, Massachusetts broken- hearted and painfully hurt like an animal that had been wounded. There was nothing left to live for. I had no more zest to continue with my life. There was only despondency and emptiness.

After some weeks had gone by of my painful griving, I remembered how my husband and I used to carry on endless conversations with each other dealing with such topics as his philosophic views encompassing a variety of different subject matters as well as his discussing our own daily life together. Then, suddenly at this precise moment, what came to mind were his very words to me. He would continually repeat one of his favorite expressions, (Poor Richard's Almanac-Benjamin Franklin-"The pen is.

"mightier than the sword.") saying , Remember my darling, the biggest ammunition and the best mental therapy is a pen and paper. This is what inspired me finally to take action and write my book and what motivated me to share with my readers the experiences I, myself had gone through during war-time in the period of my adolescent years, so long gone by.

This is not a novel or another fictitious tale, but a portion of the story of my own life. This story is full of ardent countless events, surviving the turmoil of war with an interrupted childhood and education, undergoing physical and psychological suffering, which to this very day remains imbedded in my head. I tried many years to put my past aside and to bury it, to forget the way we lived with uncertainty from day to day, however, these terrible nightmares always seem to keep constantly surfacing and still haunt me even today. The war was long ago, and yet the painful memories I thought would have vanished by now still are fresh and is a memory I shall keep.

It is well over fifty years since the war ended, but everything stays imprinted in my memory forever. I remember many episodes as if they happened today. Each time when I run through recalling my vivid memories, I am astonished by how much a person is able to endure and overcome for survival. How different the flow of my life would have been if only war did not occur. War changed lives of everyone. Some survived...some were killed... some were hanged or some were burned...and some went mad...

"RECOLLECTION"

KALISZ (POLAND)

CHAPTER 1

I was born in Poland in 1926 in the town of Kalisz. I was only one offspring that my parents had and in my family there were four uncles and six aunts and nine cousins. The whole family belonged to the middle class and lived in apartments.

My parents and I lived in a four room apartment that was well furnished but it was not enough for us, so I had to sleep in our dining room and our maide slept in the kitchen. In Poland it wasn't unusual to have a maide in the average middle class society. Our made used a folding bed to sleep in. During the day time the kitchen looked very impressive with a shiny red floor that glistened like a mirror which was polished every day to retain its look. The kitchen furniture we had was totally white and the curtain that hung were hand embroided.

My father was a handsome blond-blue eyed man the complete opposite to my mothers' pitch-black hair and brown eyes. They were both considered a good looking couple and loved each other.

My father had a strong domineering character and worked hard. He developed his own business which took many years to establish. Thanks to his persistance and many hours of hard labor the last few years before W.W.2 made his dreams come true. He had one of the best mechanical shop in town equipped with the best sophisticated machines imported from Germany on Pulavski Str.

~~A~~str.

My mother didn't work at all. Only in the last few years before the war did she help out my father in the office doing almost nothing, but this was when I was older in age.

I was a shy unspoiled child with lots of fantasias and dreams but I was not allowed to express myself. I was told that "children shouldn't be heard".

I wanted badly to have a sibling either brother or sister so that I could have someone to love and to talk to but I couldn't place an order for it. Being an only child made me unhappy. Sometimes I would play with my cousin Adek who used to live in the same building and sometimes I played with my cousin Mila who lived elsewhere, because my mother would visit her sister, Milas' mother. My cousin Mila was older than I by four years. She only had a mother and aunts, since she lost her father in her infancy due to an illness. Because of this, all the aunts and uncles felt sorry for her and spoiled her rotten. She received so much attention and they put her on a high pedestal and pampered her, that by comparison I felt like "Cinderella" to her. Everything was only for Mila.

Once upon a time my father received a gigantic doll as a gesture of thankful appreciation for his service of ingenuity for repairing the toy-factory owner's machines that would produce toys and facilitate its production. This callosal doll was dressed up in the rich Polish national costume.

Both my aunts happened to live in the same street which my father happened to pass on the way to my home. He was so excited

to receive such a present of such magnitude (such dolls weren't even heard of then) for his achievement that by evening time when work was through, before going home he dropped by my two aunt's apartment building to show them this doll. It was so beautiful when my two aunts saw this doll they began persuading my father to offer this doll to my cousin Mila, "oh Janus you can't give it to your daughter, she is much too young for it! She will make a mess from it in a minute, but if you give it to Mila she will take good care of it and play with Dzunia(me) so everyone will be happy. Remember that Mila doesn't have a father. You, Janushek will do a good deed". (I was about 5 years of age at that time) So my father feeling guilty for Mila after a lengthy persuasion gave it up to my cousin. This event was withheld from me for many years. I didn't know about this happening until up to the time of when I was mature.

When I first took notice of this doll it was sitting in Milas' living room. I held on to my breath. I said; "Oh, Mila, I never saw such a beautiful doll! Oh, look her costume and the beads! Can I just touch her?". "No! don't you dare!" she warned me. "You can only look at her". Each time I came to visit her I glanced at this doll with both; envy and admiration. I was never allowed to even play with that beautiful doll. I only played with that which Mila would order me to, and when I didn't agree with her she would pull my hair messing it up making me cry because of the pain and humiliation.

As a child I was seldom permitted to play with other play-mates. I was dressed in starched dresses hand embroidered. Some were hand me

downs of Mila. I wasn't permitted to dirty myself and was always repeatedly nagged by my mother who was dressed very elegantly; "Dzunia ('that was me' that was my nick name from Edza-Edzunia) don't pick that up! Don't sit on this dirty place! Don't play with this dirty girl! Don't bend over too much! Don't stick your stomach out too far "and so forth. During my young years I lived a life of a wound up toy. My mother would take me to the park almost every day in the afternoon for my recreation where she would sit on the bench and I could play with my colorful ball or I would play a very popular children's game of controlling the movement of a big colorful wheel as I ran with a small stick to keep it from tipping over. My mother was always with me also because Gentile children would bother me with very anti-Semitic remarks. We never could tell when they would throw rocks or stones at me. In my ears still ring those insulting calls; "Hey you dirty Jew! Go to Palestine! We don't want you here!". When I grew up and went to school I couldn't take side streets because I would be attacked by mobs of Gentile urchins who would beat me up." Mamusu, why do they hate us so much?" I would cry out as I washed my injured places on my body and recombined my two skinny braids. When I would walk to Sunday school my mother would always come to escort me. Many times I would hear a hateful song sung to me rhyming but it was stupid; "Zyduweczka Hajka

sprzedawala jajka

sprzedawala nici

gola dupa swieci"

(A Jew name Hyka was selling eggs and spool of threads, shines

with naked ass). From my childhood I avoided Gentile kids and I made many Jewish friends like Marysa Znaimirowska, Estusia Vingart, Milpa Aronson and many more but my best bosom friend was Ala Jarecka. I just became thirteen year of age that the war broke out and change my life and love to my so much beloved country Poland. This agricultural country, bordered on the East side by Russia (The Soviet Union), and on the West side by Germany. The southern part of Poland is separated by the Carpathean Mountains from Czechoslovakia and Rumania. Kalisz, one of the oldest towns in Poland is situated near the German border. The culture of our region during this time was greatly influenced by the Germans since this area was highly populated by them. This town Kalisz, -prior to my birth had been in the past numerous times burnt to the ground and as a result of frequent wars, kept being rebuilt and re-modernized. A winding river called Prosna, meandered through the town just like a long supple serpent, creating a picturesque scene. This town was the rhythm of the city and was called by many, "Paris in miniature". It had two libraries, four cinemas ; which was considered a lot for this size of town at this time. It had many schools and churches, two Jewish Synagogues, (one of which was orthodox and after the war disappeared from the surface of the earth, and the other one- a modern one, was left in ruins on Krotka street) and a beautiful great theater on the edge of the river; reflecting its image onto the Prosna River. The town was surrounded by enormous fields that consisted of rye, wheat and oats with stalks that rustled, undulated and bent to the ground from the smallest of drafts in

the summer time, since their spikes full of grains were heavy in weight. Scattered amongst these rich golden fields grew wild flowers; sharp blue bachelors buttons with their heads with the appearance of seeming as if they were shredded and mixed in with delicate fragrant trumpets of pinkish-mauve cockle, altogether sprinkled with snow white daisies that brought out its centers of bright yellow and alternated with vivid red wild poppies as well as dispersed amongst other types of wild flowers. Many times, in my childhood I would walk through these lovely fields with my mother to visit the remote cemetery.

"Dzunia! Dzunia! wake up! my mom would laugh tugging me. It is time to wake up my sleepy-head! The sun is shining, the birds are singing and you still sleeping! " I only opened up one eye and then closed it, telling her half awake; "No, I want to sleep!" When finally you wake up! or...Should I bring you a cat to lick out your little eyes?" My mother was bending over me with her frolicsome, smiling and beautiful face.

I open with a horror my sleepy eyes gouching; "No! I don't want a cat, what's the hurry? Let me sleep!" "No you can't, today we are going to visit your grandmother's cemetery" replied my laughing mother. In a minute later I forgot that I was mad because I always liked taking long walks through golden fields even it was much too much for 5 year kid. I jump from my bed and I wash, dress and gobble my breakfast in matter of minutes. On our way to the cemetery, we would pluck these wild flowers to make multicolored bouquets. We enjoyed both this beauty that nature brought us and the man-made creation of vegetation. Also, in this heavenly

beautiful assemblage, we were surrounded by hovering buzzing bees, and jumping grasshoppers as birds would fly above chirping. Here, on the path overgrown by grass in this field, we used to sit and relax taking the multi-colored flowers from the bouquets and braid them into beautiful garlands which I would proudly place and wear on my head with such pride. Garlands were a part of Poland's national costume which is called "wianki".

Beside the wheat, oat, and rye fields were fields of green cabbage and the tomato plants supported by wooden frames that were covered with an abundant yield. There were fields of carrots, potatoes, cauliflowers, cucumbers, and buckwheat and so many other types of produce. But, the most attractive and enchanting of all to me were the dazzling hue of silky multicolored fields cultivating poppy flowers. When these poppies would ripen, their delicate petals would drop off leaving the protruded head to be revealed solitarily; it would appear as if it bore a bald head wearing a crown. This is what we would tear off. We simply could not resist this tempting, delicious tasty morsel. We would pop these seeds directly into our mouths, chew them with relish and would swallow them happily satisfied.

This Jewish cemetery was far-off, out of the town as was every Jewish cemetery in Poland, as Christian cemeteries were located within the town. In every aspect, we were considered second-class citizens which did not have the right and privileges to stand up for themselves.

A few kilometers ahead there were small hamlets and villages, beautiful in their simplicity. The white-washed wooden

houses with thatched roofs were frequently the nesting places of sparrows and storks. Domestic animals roamed about on the green meadows. It was breath-taking to see this peaceful setting. Every Tuesday and Thursday, villagers would come to the town's market to sell their produce and fresh berries and mushrooms that they would gather in the early morning that day from the nearest forest. These people were simple, salt of the earth, hard-working, uneducated farmers. The town folks called these farmers "HAMY"*. The town's folks were for the most part semi-educated, (with some exceptions) and worked mostly in factories. The more educated individuals had jobs such as town clerks, administrators and judges. Many, less or not educated were employed also by the government as blue collar workers. No white or any blue collar jobs on the town's payroll were given to jews. They were openly

*defined as peasants in a down-grading manner

excluded completely. Being discriminated, humiliated, segregated and barred from any privileges, Jews strived very hard to overcome their suppression. As of that they developed other skills and became extremely professional. They excelled. They became tailors, shoemakers, bakers, smiths, silversmiths and goldsmiths, carpenters, cabinet makers, barbers, furriers and etc... They were all sorts of businessmen and doctors, surgeons, lawyers and professors achieving the highest levels of education, despite of the government's restriction on limiting Jewish education and even further, limiting the quota on state schools.

The quota allowed only two to three percent in a classroom to

be admitted after the passing of the strict essay, written and oral. Their universities also didn't admit any young people whatsoever from the Jewish faith. "The Numerus Clausus" rule prevailed. It meant absolutely no admittance of Jews. The Jewish parents had to work hard through the nights to be able to send their children to another country where they paid their hard earned money to provide them with the best of education. They attained the impossible...

In 1933, a new generation of well educated Jews emerged. They were the so-called "flowers of the town" the top notch. Unfortunately, not everyone could obtain the money to have the privilege of being highly educated, and as of that, they were only tolerated. Many of them lived in poverty too, mostly living in ghettos with some experiencing hunger and miserable living conditions and unassimilated and could only be educated in there Yiddish School Chaders: which was conducted in their ethnic tongue. These people hardly spoke Polish. Hooligans mostly targeted these people.

Just the year before the Germans invaded Poland, one late evening my aunt and my uncle, returning from the theater in the night, were attacked from the rear. She was pushed to the ground by a hooligan. Her head hit the pavement's curb of the side-walk they were on and she never regained consciousness. Six medical consultants from all over the country couldn't save her life. She died of a brain hemorrhage. This was not an unusual situation. Beatings and insults on the streets were well-known... Many Jews were attacked in the same manner. This kind of a pattern in

Polish history was not new.

The venom of hate and bigotry was exploding mostly so a few years before the war, when Jews started to prosper. In 1939, abhorrence and animosity hit a higher degree. At that time, Kalisz had well over 60 thousand inhabitants and almost half of them were Jews.

THE AGGRESSION chapter 2

It all started in the year of 1939 , at the end of the summer, a hot August. It all began when I was barely 13 years old, and still to this day everything remains clear and fresh in my memory.

It happened on a beautiful , peaceful day. The pale, lazy-blue sky was covered with transparent white clouds which were scattered softly in the stratosphere .It was hot. The downy milkweeds were flowing softly in the air. The Polish people call it "Babie Lato"(old summer) . Suddenly , unexpectedly German planes, marked with their black emblems , appeared in the sky, circling all over our town. They came down in a circular motion just like ravenous hawks looking for prey. People stopped struck with horror, staring at them in consternation. Everyone stood frozen in shock , looking at each other dumfounded .Even traffic came to a complete standstill. People alarmed ,came out of their homes and shops to watch these planes bearing strange big black "Hakenkreuz" (means in German, broken- crosses) which was a symbol of Germany. Although the appearances of these planes were brief , everyone of us knew that we were in direct danger. The planes overcasted the sky like unexpected heavy clouds which at any time could burst open with loud thunder and lightening bringing in an unexpected downpour. That was considered a bad omen. Evidently , the Germans were looking for something and in a very short time they disappeared. Although rumors did spread widely in all Polish newspapers that lately political sentiments of Germany were such of an unfriendly nature, they still didn't

think that the Germans would go so far. It was just minutes before, that the Kaliszans led a life undisturbed, not agitated, and unshaken being that they were safe and that they went about their daily lives and instantaneously they lost their sense of security. It was obvious to everyone that this incident was a menace of a forthcoming war! Our instincts warned us that it was inevitable.

People were at the end of their wits starting to mobilize the young and the old, to dig anti-tank ditches outside the town. Every day, in the early morning a big pilgrimage of volunteers would walk out of the town to the outskirts to dig those ditches. They thought that these ditches would protect them from a possible German attack. Everyone participated with ardor in this supportive act of patriotism. I too, volunteered. My heart palpitated with "patriotic" fever. I was very eager to join this crowd of Kaliszans for this patriotic duty.

At the end of this "heroic" day ,my hands unaccustomed to a shovel, were covered with sores,blisters and blood. But, I was very proud to help " My Country" out as I loved it dearly.

The following days after, people panicked more and more. Some were preparing to supply themselves with provisions such as buying; potatoes, flour ,sugar and coal for the winter ,counting on the war to bring them discomfort as well as its many inconveniences.Thus,in Poland in order to have an ample supply of baked goods on hand, one had to make sure they didn't forget the priority of frequenting the facility of the bakery.It was a matter of practicality , convenience and efficiency that people

customarily would visit the town's bakery utilizing their facility to bake their own goods for a minimal fee. During this mass confusion and panic , people rushed to these bakeries carrying their cookie-sheets filled with sliced breads and rolls (so that they would turn into rusk), preparing for the bad days ahead. All you could see everywhere were cookie sheets. Cookie-sheets here and cookie-sheets there. Everyone knew that war was in the air and that it would maybe even bring on hunger. Those people who had families who lived in nearby villages fled towards those small isolated places in order to join their family for their own protection as well as for their own safety and just as well as for an economical reason in case they did confront starvation. They thought they would be free from any danger by fleeing to these villages since there, farms harvested in surplus.

We too, desired to flee into these villages however, we had no relatives there and to go elsewhere would mean a situation more complex financially.

My father was at that time involved in the metallurgical industry. Our cash flow had been tied up in money notes as in Poland, the entire Commerce was based on the bill of exchange. Banks were closed as a result of the turmoil of war thus one could not obtain any liquid currency. Therefore, any such activities connected with escaping was deemed absolutely impossible.

Panic was increasing in the town. Everyone tried escaping from a possible bombardment and from the eventuality if ever we were faced with the terrible act of meeting with the disastrous consequence of gas bombs being dropped on us. For days we practiced

on and on, on how and when to use gas-masks.

One day our neighbors rented a hay-wagon and invited us to join them to escape the first stage of the forthcoming war. It was sheer luck that their destination happened to be one of ours since they too were intending to travel in the same direction. For that, we were grateful for, as well as rejoiced delightfully and we decided to join them in their journey. The irony was that this couple, being that the husband was the editor of an anti-semitic newspaper and involved in the activities in an organization named "ENDECJA" (the National democratic party) propagating very anti-semitic feelings and was now aiding in the transportation of us Jews. In Poland, it was customary for every Pole to have their very own Jew as that favored one and we just happened to be the ones they favored.

About 130 kilometers had already been traveled tediously, dragging on encumbersomely, laboring us further, slowing our pace down in that the mares we could only acquire (The Polish army took possession of all healthy horses.) were the only means of transportation available to us. Traveling days and nights our stops were brief only to spend some small period of time in the night sleeping in hay lofts, resting for the next day's journey exhausted and drained with the task of completing further on till we reached our neighbor's destination. We went through small villages, fields and woods. We still had at least 30 more kilometers to go. Our destination was Lodz. We were passed by a multitude of terribly frightened people along the way. They were terrified of the upcoming raid. The only kind of transport they

could acquire were carts or hay-wagons, or they would simply travel by foot. The highway swarmed with an endless amount of refugees. Many people escaped walking with their small children; some of them were carrying them in their arms and some were in their prams. In the middle of the road a shepherd would control her small flock of geese with the help of dogs. Sadness and horror was painted on everyone's faces; the bundles they carried were tied up with knots. They would run in haste to a destination unbeknown to them. No-one wished to be taken over by the Germans. The sick and the old family members were being transported on stretchers or on wagons which had been pulled by their relatives since there was a lack of horses. And those people from these villages who did own a wagon with a horse, packed their most important belongings; such as their one mattress or a single chair which deplorably protruded out of their wagons. People also packed whatever they could maybe need, which they held so very important to them. This traffic alternated with their precious and only possessions; cows, goats, ducks, geese, and whatever else was alive. Everyone was fleeing in panic. The animal noises that were mixed with the shrieks and wails of these people escaping were at a decibel loud enough to muffle the sounds of the wagon wheels that were rattling because of their old and primitive age. This commotion was unbelievable. It was like a disorderly pilgrimage to Mecca. But, where was Mecca?.. The image was terrifying and its chaos and its uncertainty was so great that this panic could actually be physically felt all around us just like before an earthquake's vibration. At a

certain point, our driver motioned his horse to veer off the major road to avoid this traffic and we found ourselves on a narrow, unpaved road, between fields. That early morning it was cool .Under the blue sky the sun was still awakening from the dewy night. The air was fresh, angelically serene. It was so peaceful that even insects weren't around. Suddenly, we heard loud and heavy sounds from oncoming planes. Without any thought, we hurriedly jumped out of our hay-wagon and hid ourselves under a solitary tree which spread out widely and was surrounded by an enormous field. The tree was so large that everyone of us could take refuge under its " green roof" ,of leaves. We were trembling with terror. Our neighbors made the sign of the cross on their chests,as they recited the " Hail Mary"- a final prayer to God.We were almost certain that at any moment we would be spotted and that they would notice us and therefore we would be shot and killed instantly.

The planes with their loud and horrifying noises flew overhead above the tree over us, coming down so low that we could clearly see them between the big branches ; their big powerful bombers with their full supply of bombs and their black, outstanding emblems. Our hearts stopped beating. With their horrifying roar they soon passed over our heads and for a short time we were numbed from emotion.Luckily,we were not spotted. We watched on following with our eyes those German planes that flew on further. Our group could see far away that those German planes had scooped down lowering themselves almost to the ground , and in a short moment we heard the echoes of machine guns, too-too-too-too, too-

too-too-too-and again and again.... Then... there was a faint echo of electrifying shouts. Then ... there was complete silence.

My group and myself got up after feeling the danger was over and left the sheltering tree and still in a state of shock climbed back into our wagon. We then traveled a short distance from our refuge and finally reached the outskirts of the forest. Suddenly up ahead we were struck by unexpected carnage. At the glade just before the forest, we noticed many people and horses lying slain. They were spread out all over the glade in different positions, having had fallen into the tall grass near the woods. It was obvious and clear that they were shot by those machine guns from the bypassing aggressive German planes. These people who are now perished, must have been so petrified when they saw those planes, that with extreme panic and with their last bit of breath, tried fleeing into the forest trying to save their very lives and unfortunately, these innocent victims in their attempt became trapped in these empty glades when German planes surprisingly attacked them without mercy. The Germans didn't even bother dropping their bombs. The hostile planes flew very low, having the ease of shooting their preys just the way men hunt down rabbits. A woman laid slain still clutching her pillow as another was still holding a dead child in her arms... We could see horses still in agony due to bullets lodged in them. I saw vapor rise from wounded bodies as well as the gushing blood from the numerous victims that were visible in the crisp early morning air, which remains so unforgettable to me till this very day. I

screamed with horror and my mother covered my eyes with the palms of her hands. As quickly as possible we got away from this horrifying scene. Emotionally shaken, we continued the rest of our journey in deep silence and sorrow. When we arrived at our neighbor's destination - we separated. The couple went to their village and we ; my parents and I tried to reach Lodz. Our limited money shrank rapidly. Moreover, in that turmoil even for a big recompense it was impossible to find any kind of transportation, as those who owned that kind, used it only for themselves. In such a menacing situation, one with involving such a jeopardy, no-one would possibly ever dream of getting involved with making money. This was survival of the fittest. For us the only way to reach Lodz was - to use our feet. We walked on, intermingling with the constantly growing crowd of people, animals and the mentally disturbed who were let loose from the mental institutions due to this invasion. We walked all day. We were covered with dust, blisters, blood on our sore feet and in tears furthermore, very, very hungry. Extremely exhausted, we reached our relatives domicile by evening time.

chapter 3

Lodz

My mother's cousin was involved in the furrier business and he was the relative that lived in Lodz. He was our salvation. It was he who had offered us his place of business as our refuge. It was quite an extensive, comfortable flat. The radio in our possession was blasting messages. Radio speakers kept announcing, reassuring all citizens with their feeling of great pathos that our Brave Polish Army would finish off the Germans and that the run-aways will shortly be able to return to their abandoned homes that they left in panic. With the thought of good hope and believing every word spoken which sounded so good to our ears, that our government stood by that which they were preaching, without great worry, we all finally fell asleep.

But-early the next morning Lodz was occupied by the Germans. The German army spored up in the city like mushrooms springing up after the rain. People awoke in disbelief. We could see a large part of the city which spread out far from the flat of the windows of our refuge being that it was situated right in its center. On the streets the proud ranks of the German military marched on heavily as the motorcycle brigade proceeded onward. A voice within me asked, "How could this happen? Yesterday, we felt so safe being assured by the media of our safety and now, in the morning?... Without even a small encounter? Where? Where was our Brave Army that pledged to us, people of Poland that "no enemy will ever take anything away from us, not even be able to remove a single button off our shirt?"... People started to

question whether the Polish Army was feeding us with empty promises or whether any treason was committed within their army. Out on the streets, we noticed an abnormal amount of animation. People were confused ,scattering in all directions,rushing about everywhere. They behaved as ants do when destruction comes to their ant-hill. We could see long lines of people everywhere , waiting to buy a loaf of bread or milk for their children. Peoples' faces were unhappy wearing the expression of depression. Food lines?... Never had a situation such as this one occur before the war. I can't recall whether in Poland such a problem ever existed to the degree of food lines forming.

And especially suddenly overnight,the change appeared just like with a snap of a finger. People became disoriented.There was enormous panic and anguish spreading about rapidly amongst themselves . Everyone hurried around searching for some tidbit of information. Some were rushing about trying to contact the rest of their families or friends ,who lived in the other districts of Lodz or, just to be informed of their existing horribly sudden complicated new condition. Like the others , we too went for a walk. There on the streets, numerous German soldiers dressed in their very fresh, greenish-grey army uniforms would pass us by. What stuck out the most and what they wore with special pride was their shiny black boots and faces of relaxed composure, which only magnified the terrifying awful feeling in each and everyone of us; the representation of force and power.Not even having completed our short walk we noticed a group of people gathering in a particular area..Instantly, we spotted a truck and in it on

its platform stood a man dressed in an ethnic Jewish garment whose head and shoulders were covered with a prayer shawl. Wrapped around one of his arms was a leather strap and visible on his forehead extended a small square box which contents held the holy ten commandments. This tiny box was called the tefilin and the prayer shawl was called the talis. This attire is customary to Jews who are orthodox and worn when they pray to God to show their respect and humbleness. In his hands he held a prayer book and it seemed clear that in all probability he was a Rabbi, (a holy teacher/expounder/leader/doctor of the Jewish faith.), a man of God. The truck would intentionally creep up extremely slowly so that, the public could catch a good glimpse of this spectacle to be displayed. And there were other Germans and numerous spectators who displayed their loyalty to the party who as they passed by this holy man, ridiculed him and cackled at him with sadistic laughter. To make a laughingstock of this man was a vicious act. There were those who even slandered him with hateful rude abusing words and even stronger, with ant-semitic statements and would throw raw eggs or even mud at him making a target of this gentle, vulnerable religious defenseless man. He was one of those objects Germans would amuse themselves with, which incited many bursts of hearty laughter from other bypassing Germans. For them this was a superb comedy, a performance surpassing any scenes acted on stage at any theater. Not even for a moment did the Rabbi lift up his eyes off the prayer book. His face had turned paper-white. His clothes were stained by the raw eggs and mud that remained stuck on him; that was flung maliciously at him

by those Poles.. This site was pitiful. A handful of curious bystanders looked on with anguish in their hearts full of pity however, they were unable to stop this type of " performance ". All they could do was to shrivel up inside themselves and look down to the ground with embarrassment and then retreat, since they themselves were worried and frightened about their own safety at hand. All this, I observed in horror and astonishment; the man on the platform, the vicious crowd having pleasure tormenting and ridiculing and degrading a peaceful human being. I asked myself," why?! What had this man done to deserve such treatment? Because of his religion? I thought, being that it was the end of the 20'th century, Poland had already reached the "acme of civilization" Its education, ethics as well as culture seemed to be at least at par or better than most other countries. Could it be possible that Poland's civilization was only superficial? At the end of the twentieth century going back to 1648, to the Chmielnicki era?... (Massacre in Poland)"

I was full of sorrow. For the first time in my life, as I witnessed this hideous act as a youngster, I felt ashamed for the people of Poland. I once again asked myself," What was their motive for this shameful behavior of degradation? But whose degradation was it anyhow?" Having observed such a theatrical humor provoked by this type of persecution and further induced by these persecutors, as I will call them it, had imprinted in my brain the painful reality that deals with my entire life. This image still haunts me to this day... ..

We rejoined our family now afflicted by grief and sorrow due to witnessing this despicable act of mockery. It was totally useless to prolong our sojourn in the occupied town of Lodz. To remain staying in someone's home just for the sake of it didn't make sense to us, so our plan was to return to our home town of Kalisz hoping that in a few days from now there would be more stability there, in that town.

RETURNING BACK TO KALISZ

After my father was able to find some money for transportation, we rented a horse-drawn cart and proceeded in the direction of Kalisz. As we traveled from small towns to small towns, we passed numerous farms and villages having already been destroyed by fire. Time to time we had to stop to shop for food and change the cart, otherwise we constantly ambled across fields.

The light breeze carried with her in the air the heavy smell of burnt dwellings. The odor lingering around was so strong that there was no doubt that the fire was a recent one. The result of the heavy bombardment and violent acts of the occupied forces had not spared any houses they passed along their way. The gloomy sky and the air saturated with the devastation was a dreary combination. The look and the odors of the extinguished burnt remains presented a deploring picture. As we would walk halfway through, or even completely finish walking through burnt villages numerous times, as we passed the ruins and the extinguished cinders, many times a frightened chicken would frantically cackle running under our feet and/or a confused cat entangled within those remains would be frightened away by the sound of our footsteps sending a distrustful meow as we entered into its premises.

But, as we passed through settlements, only a small number of those houses missed the devastation. Some were left abandoned, many were half demolished and others were left only in ash. It was when my parents and I, while driving by in our cart, that people at that particular moment began to reappear, coming out of

their place of hiding; returning to their domicile or to what remains there was left of it. Mostly, they would gather into a group on somebody's house's threshold. There, they would stand around depressed, sharing their own experiences with others, or would lament someone else's misfortune. They looked frightened. They were horrified with anguish.

We too stopped to chat with them. They told us that during the night German soldiers took Jews without warning, drawing them out of their homes, beating them sadistically, then taking them away in trucks to a destination unknown...The story they told was full of horrors. It was so dreadful that we felt emotionally dispirited. It was hard to believe that man could be so savage as to destroy a race for their own German glory. We left the village dejected and with sorrow for the innocent people who had been the target of barbaric behavior.

When we, my parents and myself, finally arrived in our hometown, life appeared to be normal, but the streets had changed; they were full of German soldiers walking and marching there. Their look was impeccable yet they were impertinent and insolent. Their boots shined glossy. They would stomp their feet loudly on the pavements. Their faces were shaven clean. Everyone of them wore a triumphant expression on their face and each of them acted as if they alone were a conqueror. Their arrogance, superciliousness and their act of superiority was present by the way they walked as well as in the manner of which they behaved. It was as if those sidewalks belonged to them...

Buildings -schools were closed... Our neighbors those who traveled with us in the direction of Lodz also returned to their apartment building which happened to be the same as ours. They lived on the same floor also. Shortly afterwards, the German authority demanded that everyone give up their radio transmitters. The Germans wanted to cutoff any information being transmitted as, English radio broadcast would constantly bombard news from abroad which would make the Germans feel uncomfortable. To the Germans their own propaganda was a powerful tool. They warned Polish citizens that they would severely punish anyone who disregarded their order. Therefore, we had to give up our radio transmitter, but our neighbors, in spite of the dangerous warning decided to hold on to theirs and told us so in secrecy. They assured us that every time the evening news would be broadcasted

from over-seas, they would call us; so every evening we would wait for a knock on our door. They used a pass-word which meant ; that the transmission of the B.B.C. from " Radio Free Europe" was being transmitted. Immediately, we eagerly joined our neighbor to listen to the latest news. This type of activity continued for many evenings. Each evening we would gather together with the hope that one day there would be a change in our situation, but the forthcoming news worsened day by day. Without hope of aid from any country, we were left in despair. We, my parents, neighbors, myself along with the general Polish populace were aghast that Poland was invaded with such an abhorrent behavior, in such a manner utilizing methods of inhumane abuse and that no country was ready to protect her even though she was defenseless. So far, even France and England were silent.

On the 8th of October 1939 a proclamation was announced, that Germany had officially declared that the part of Poland, (including the town of Kalisz) had already been annexed to Germany". Poland under the Germans was subdivided into three administrative districts. The districts of Poznan, Wroclaw, and Lodz with their province to be called "The Third Reich" (Watherland) and is designated to become "Jude rein" which meant cleansed of Jews. Wherever and anywhere we walked on the streets, the town was draped everywhere in gigantic red German flags where the black swastika stuck out from a white circle background of the flag. These flags hung outside out of buildings everywhere. Constant German bellicose parades marched throughout entire streets . Jewish stores including my own relative's store were

also assailed. On their display windows and doors as on its sides, were painted all over with big black swastikas or star's of David with Polish slogans in script " Do not buy from a Jew!".Big Jewish businesses were attacked in the same manner. Store windows were broken and store keepers were beaten up.That was not only a German brutality but that also by that of the Poles as well .The Germans forced only Jews to pick up broken pieces of glass scattered all about on the streets. The open pick- up trucks full of German military and civilian men both wearing arm bands with swastikas ,together with the Poles drove through the streets and called out to the public through loud speakers, yelling out " Beat the hell out of the Jew! Kalisz has to be cleansed of Jews! They are our greatest enemy.They are the enemy of the whole world! " Their nasty provocations and profanities toward Jews pierced throughout the streets. Everytime it happened, it was like a sharp knife cutting into everyone's heart .

On~~y~~ November 14.1939 German authorities ordered all Jews regardless of age, to wear on their right arm a 10 centimeter wide yellow band which was used in quickly detecting them (Jews). They warned us that if this order was ignored death would be our punishment. We already knew from the others that death would be carried out by execution, in addition there would also be torture beforehand...For the Jews a different curfew had been issued also not allowing them to leave their homes from 5 pm.- 8 am. Any violation of such would result in death .

Kalisz was known for its unfriendliness toward Jews throughout

Polish history , way before the war, or to be more precise, from the 15'th century on. The yellow band was for them another tool in recognizing prey to help in the extermination of the Jews, just like waiving down a red flag in front of an infuriated bull in a Spanish Arena. This indeed was a handy precedent to stimulate participation in the persecution of Jews. The Poles infested with their hatred which had no limit toward Jews, looked for any excuse they had to instill fear in every Jew, assuming that they would not only be favored in the eyes of the Germans but protected as well from them , under German grace .

----- And the Germans hunted down Jews just like dog-catchers on every street-corner or at the gates at every house. " ARYANS " (Christian Poles) squealed on and pointed to every Jewish male and those Jews who were revealed had to unzip their trousers affirming their Jewish identity, being that they were circumcised , a ritual of the Jewish faith, as Jews did not always portray semitic features . Many also had been so assimilated that, not knowing them personally ,it was impossible to identify them as Jews, and some even had long forgotten their own ethnic origin and their religion as well. They merged with Christians, not even admitting to themselves that they were once Jews . For Germans to identify these people, it was impossible, so they needed to use " The favorable assistants" , collaborators. Their work was to verify a Jew and they were very successful at it. The Germans started dragging Jews from the streets and from their homes and forced them with terror to do slave labor. This behavior was called "ACTION". In this "ACTION"

many were beaten and deprived of human dignity. Women were forced to wash floors and public bathrooms with their own underwear. Street beggars were on purposefully mixed in with high status people so to break Jewish morale. The most degrading jobs were given to educated Jews . Everything was planned ahead in time with German precision to achieve the result of the most sadistic effect. Futhermore, they demanded a " contribution"(forced) of: money, gold and valuable items. That was repeated many times and always ended up in bloodshed. My father once was very late for our dinner. When he finally arrived home many hours tardy for supper my mother and I noticed his eyes were red and swollen. He was so upset and emotional that we, my mother and I couldn't reach him for a long time as he was unable even to talk. It took him quite some time to overcome his emotion and to regain his composure, to be able to tell us what kind of unpleasantness had delayed him for his dinner. It happened that his good friend; a German, who lived in Kalisz who was employed by a big Jewish business, detained my father with other Jews as well, on the street . This so-called good friend was collaborating with the Germans, keeping busy with the " Noble activity" of catching as many Jews as possible , in the company of " his new friends" the gendarmes. My father couldn't believe it. He was forced in "Action" by his friend! They used to spend so much time together. Such a refined gentleman! His good friend had actually stopped him for such a dishonorable work! After many unpleasant hours of filthy degrading work, he, "the stab in the back friend" finally escorted my father out through the back door ,boasting to my

father how magnanimous he himself was the "collaborator" that let him(my father) out earlier than... anyone else from the job. "You are lucky today", he said " but you better leave Kalisz as soon as possible! I will not be able to help you! Don't count on me! Jews and Gipsies are condemned to die." My father because of this was so dejected and wounded emotionally and psychologically that he avoided answering our questions any more about this matter.

And, the abuse by the Germans magnified from day to day with beatings and interrogations, a routine consistent throughout the entire Polish Jewish population, not excluding my father.

We had every day this kind of "ACTION" in our town... then bloodshed would follow. We were at least happy to see him alive. All else was less important to us. We wanted only to survive to the end of this war. Thinking about this unpleasant occurrence, we choked with tears and disgust afflicted with tremendous amount of sadness. We were helpless. What else could we do !?

Before the German invasion, I was surrounded by many friends, mostly Jewish, since there was always religious hostility from the others. But I, also had a non Jewish friend. To the astonishment of everyone including myself, my friend was a girl educated in the parochial school called "Nazareth". Dressed in a black dress, she wore a wide brimmed black hat and on her bosom hung a large cross and she was escorted most of her time by a nun wearing a black habit. But...She liked me. Each time when she saw me from afar, she would run up to me and kiss me and hug me. Every week we would meet in the town square,

walking and exchanging the events of our day. Since my return to Kalisz , I seldom wore my yellow band. Wandering about one day through the streets, on one of my escapades , I was looking for a friendly and familiar face. There weren't many familiar faces on the streets. I reached the town square. In the crowd I spotted my non Jewish friend but she avoided me for the first time .It was I who, stopped her. She was embarrassed and timid and look all around. Then her eyes fixed onto the ground. There weren't any kisses and hugs anymore. She said, "I cant see you anymore! My mother has forbidden me to see you . You are Jewish! It is too dangerous." She left me speechless as she spouted out her words, breathless all at once. My heart sunk like a ton of bricks. I couldn't understand why I was Jewish. Why was I punished for being Jewish? Why was I born Jewish? Why did the whole world hate Jews?... Then, German officials ordered every Jew disregarding their age to wear two yellow stars of David with the black letters "Jude" which the Jewish populace received by mail. It was mandatory for one to sew it on their coat on the visible side in the front and also on the back of the coat ,for quick identification. They also warned ; "Any Jew that does not expose their identity will be punished by hanging"...

Being that I was out of the house oftently, I was more than once a witness watching from afar in the streets, elderly Jewish men who were dressed in ethnic garb, openly exposed to the Germans by Polish collaborators to be pointed out by them , resulting therefore ,in the S.S. men (the so called "THE ELITE") to get involved by beating these Jewish men ferociously for no apparent

reason and more so, sadistically till they bled profusely. They would throw their ethnic caps to the ground. I watched a poor defenseless man turn ghost-white frightened out of his mind after the Germans spat on him completely covering his entire face with their saliva. Then, on top of this, the Germans inflicted an incredible amount of pain, sadistically furthermore, they tugged and pulled the victim's beard (being that he was pious, he wore a beard ie distinguishing him as such) with such extreme hatred. Then ,with mockery they would remove his beard with a blunt instrument, tearing at his skin .I saw this performance on others also, which resulted in with the burning of their beards lit by matches. That was a customary routine on the streets of Kalisz to degrade and crumble the whole Jewish population, naming them "The Enemy Of The Whole World" , to end their dreams to survive even to the point of undergoing humiliation. They robbed them from the last hope to live.

After these few incidents my parents limited my ventures going to the streets... There was more and more "ACTION" in this town. None of the Jews, were allowed to walk on our town's sidewalks when wearing outfits labeled with a designated symbol of the star of David and to add matters worse were restricted to only utilize those streets that were traveled by horses. More so, we Jews, weren't even allowed to be present anywhere in public places.

Since my father as a Jew, an owner of a modern machine shop wasn't allowed to employ any of his previous workers, in that all workers were forbidden to work for any Jewish businesses, which my fathers shop was, he, himself had to produce the shop's jobs alone so that he could sustain a living for himself and his family as well and furthermore, to continue to keep the business alive. He hoped that although he had no support from anyone but himself, that if he kept it going this situation would soon change.

One late morning my father was surprised by an unexpected visitor at his business, a Pole from German descent. His Polish was fluent and so was his command of the German language. Before the war, a large population of Germans habituated in Kalisz. They considered themselves to be Polish as they pretended to be, but during the time of occupation, their loyalty shifted automatically towards Germany; they, being so called "Folks-Doiche". Their reward for their loyalty to Hitler and for their collaboration with the Germans was that they were granted German citizenship giving them the right to plunder any Jewish property.

Our expected visitor was dressed in a trench coat, holding a cigarette butt between his thumb and index. He spoke to my father with a superb artificial politeness, sardonically smiling. This visitor presented my father a proposition in which he, my father had to sell him, the visitor, his business. My father astonished told the visitor that he didn't see any reason why should sell

his business to him. The man then left as if nothing had happened at all. The next day the second visit consisted of six S.S. men and the same previous visitor, himself. Without any preface and any explanation my father was arrested on the spot and his business property was confiscated. The visitor proclaimed himself the proprietor of the business and the transaction was finished with my father being escorted out of the building by the German police and led to the local Town-Hall. Captured like a criminal under the pointed rifles he led through streets and then thrown in to an ancient dungeon that lied underneath the Town-hall. The shape of the Town-Hall was built square, low and flat. This building had a large grassy square frontage which was well maintained. This particular building was in the past constructed by the Swedes when they occupied Poland. Erected on top of this building was a tall tower with a steeple on it with a large clock in big black Roman numerals. It was visible to the eyes from a faraway distance and it dispersed its gongs all over the town, every quarter of an hour. With this Town Hall, in its lower parts were ancient dungeons left by the Swedes. These dungeons were dark, humid and full of rats. They were never use till the time the Germans found use from them.

Notified by some bystanders about my father's arrest, my mother rushed to the Town Hall. After a long and exhausting bureaucratic day, torn between offices, brushed off like a fleck of dust from one desk to another, she was finally affirmed at the end of a day with a most common German arrogance, that indeed her husband was imprisoned in the dungeons below. That was all the

information she received. So, my mother speaking German fluently, with indefatigable persistence nagged the assigned soldiers stationed at the doors of the Town Hall for any information concerning my father. "Ha! Ha! Ha! "The soldiers were arousing with laughter "your Johan is sharing hotel room downstairs with many dirty Jews. Hey only infecting our air. They are parasite and blood-suckers" That was continued for sometime. They laughed and mocked her, yet finally, they advised her to bring food to the prisoner; something like hot soup.

The next day my mother rushed over to the Town Hall with a container of hot soup. There, the guard designated to the jail took from her the feed and requested her to wait for him. Upon his return, he handed her back the empty container with a small, narrow scrap of cigarette wrapping - paper with my father's handwriting on it. He only wrote a short message, "Please! Get lots of soup and cigarettes!! Thankful, love Janek". For three days she managed miraculously and successively to obtain the feed and to carry out the routine... On the following day someone knocked on our door at our home. It so happened that I being the closest to the door opened it spontaneously and thoughtlessly. I froze... I faced a young German soldier standing on our thresh-hold. I was still standing with my mouth wide open thinking that this is only a phantom, but it wasn't. I could feel my blood stop circulating in my veins. He was tall, slim and blond. His blue eyes were surrounded by almost white eyelashes and his face was covered with lots of brownish freckles. He portrayed a typical "Hitler Yugen" (Hitler youth-

breed) Frightened and speechless, I felt as if I had been nailed down to the floor. Suddenly, I began to perspire and my heart palpitated with enormous speed. We knew all about what the Hitler Yugen was and that it was a fanatic breed driven by Hitler's Doctrine. They were his pride, glory and joy—a danger to society. At that time of opening up the door I started imagining all sorts of possibilities of horror, already so familiar to me. I could hear how fast and strong my heart was beating. I felt my life would soon slip away and that I was close to fainting. I imagined him pulling me into the street and smacking me over the head with his rifle as well as my mother becoming his victim, furthermore I got carried away in my thinking of the horrendous abuses we, my mother and I would have to endure. Seeing and noticing my confusion, he warmly smiled at me asking in German for my mother, who appeared in no time with a horror in her eyes.. After a few words which were exchanged between them in regard to my father, my mother invited him into our home. Over a cup of "erzats" coffee, as that was the only thing attainable then, he started to explain his personal reason for this visitation. He told us that frequently, he is holding the guard position watching the Jewish prisoners in the dungeon. Unseen and far from the eyes of other Germans, frequently had he opportunity to talk with my father since my father was fluent in German. As the conversations became more verbose and friendly, he grew fond of my father, developing with him a dangerous friendship. My father had given him his beautiful gold watch and gold fountain pen, asking him only to contact us and to warn my mother of her

dangerous situation. To be warned by a young German soldier was unthinkable! He didn't do this because of the gift. It was so obvious to everyone, that any German, could without any effort at any time usurp for himself anything whatsoever he wished. This young soldier was for some reason very different from the rest in his country - men who were sucked in by this "volcanic-hate and fury". He came to us to warn us!... It was such a heroic gesture. If only more of them were the same... So human! It was so noble. Even in such a dangerous situation, he came to forewarn my mother that she should stay away from the Town Hall, not even to be near it. It was all too hard to believe. "It will be too risky for you, frau Laszczewski" he told my mother. "They will take you away. Instead of you..." he suggested, "it will be better that your daughter will take your place. She is a child, therefore will be less conspicuous". He probably saved my mother's life.

How better the world could be if there would be more people like him. If only people would tolerate each other ...

So, I took the important task into my own hands and with palpitating heart and masked horror which I didn't admit to my mother, I delivered every day routinely a big container of soup and cigarettes to the guards for my father, at the town hall.. I wanted so much to see my father, but I wasn't allowed to do so. To insist wouldn't get you anywhere besides it was dangerous too. I always returned home aching for my father with suppressed tears and a sinking heart. Everyday, the guard took from me this container full of soup and the pack of cigarettes. In a short

time the container was returned to me empty . We couldn't comprehend how such a great amount of soup could be consumed so fast. Later, we found out that among the prisoners, the soup was divided equally and consumed with only one spoon which was passed around. The portion was one spoon per person and one puff of the cigarette the same, with no exception, but it kept them alive as that was the only food delivered to them. Some of these prisoners were the wealthiest people of the town. Even wealth couldn't buy their way out of the dungeons because it was confiscated in the time of arresting them by the Germans.

One day there were no more prisoners in dungeons. They were moved out. No- one would or could tell me where they had been moved to. I returned home quivering in tears with the container full of soup and cigarettes untouched. My mother was absolutely hysterical. We didn't know what to do. We were full of terrifying and most horrifying thoughts since especially when lately in our town, there were innumerable hangings and shooting in firing squads. We couldn't sleep the whole night and concluded in thought that maybe every one of those prisoners in the town hall's dungeons were shot by the Germans.

It was still dusk and the morning's sky faintly brightened up and we still hadn't changed our clothes from the previous day nor did we even get a wink of sleep but, instead waited up for the painful moment of receiving horrible news, just the way we were.

Suddenly...There was a soft knock at our door. My mother and I

jumped up."Who is there?" mother asked with a feeble panicky trembling voice."It is your nephew, David". My cousin David was two years older than me. Hurriedly we let him inside quickly. We noticed how thin and tall he had become.He was very tense and restless . His eyes wandered about everywhere,as if he was hunted animal. In spite of this, he stayed well reserved. His young face was colorless with and had no emotion. He was in a hurry. He whispered; " I came to you to bring you the news from Uncle Janek. I shall briefly recount his incredibly shocking story. I understand that you are more than impatient to know what had happened to Uncle Janek, so at first"... He took a big breath looking into the eyes of our grave faces and without a smile he continued." Let me tell you very briefly that he is safe in our house." Then he continued, " Last night the Germans took every prisoner from the Town Hall ,moving them into a small Kanonik church. Inside there ,it was so crowded with prisoners that Uncle Janek, was pushed by a sort of stream toward the top floor. There wasn't much space to move or even to breath there.The air was saturated with heaviness and perspiration from the nervous bodies of young and old men. On his left ,he saw that there was a window. The mob of men within this Kanonick Church just happened to pushed him into the direction of this window. He somehow managed to sneak a quick look down from it . He could see only a few meters below that there was a small , narrow extension of a roof.Looking out more so, but with care outwardly towards the bottom, he noticed a street .It was a far distance to jump he thought.Wishing to

ground. Everything was done in extreme silence and very swiftly. The consequence of this performance would be fatal if not done properly. If the Germans were to detect their escape, there would be only a fraction of a second and the three of them could be lying dead on the pavement... The moment they touched ground, they started to run in different directions. They were the lucky ones as the rest was sent to concentration camp.

Worrying that he will be tracked down in his own home, Uncle Janek chose to run to our home. He felt that this action of his would seem much safer for because it would not arouse the suspicions of the denouncers.

Now, altogether with you (meaning my mother and I), he is planning to escape from Kalisz. He has given me instructions to give to you. To accomplish it correctly, you must pay strict attention to me for a few minutes." Even seeing our eagerness expressed on our faces to interrupt him with many questions, he didn't allow us to stop him and gestured with his hands not to do so and continued on with his story. After he finished he said "Now I will inform you as to what has to be done. Uncle Janek told me to convey to you: 'to not lose your time'. Pack only one suitcase with the most necessary items for light travel." Oh! and don't forget the most important; the elder-down. Uncle Janek emphasized that the elder-down has to be tided into the tiniest, smallest of bundles as possible and of course, to dress warmly! You have to get to the train station by ten o'clock and don't forget to bring his

winter overcoat and his hat! Most important of all, don't put on your garments any signs of your identity, as you can be stopped at the station and that will be the end of you! Under no circumstance should you show your fear .Fear is your enemy. Act as Aryans! Be confident.I wish you good luck. Now, you must be actors! Emotion is dangerous! I told you everything and now please... don't hold me back ! I have to run. I am myself also in danger! I have to save my skin too." We kissed him goodbye. He stopped at the door gazing at us with his red eyes lacking of sleep and had warned us for the last time," Don't be late! Remember, ten promptly!" David left in a hurry. We never saw him again..... never.

chapter 7

ESCAPING FROM KALISZ

Strained and overheated because of emotions which took over our inner souls, my mother and I trembled, terrorized from such occurrence, and hurriedly packed chaotically our belongings.

It was not an easy task to trying to fit everything we needed into one suitcase; the most necessary things which we could need after our escape for the future. As we carried out this task we put our warmer winter clothes on trying to look our best. On the day of our departure it was cloudy and chilly. The heavy overcast was present and wasn't a sign too promising of good weather. Just as we began to flee from our home, snow started mere dusting of innocent flakes. Then a few moments later, this snow began heavily covering pavements leaving a thin fluffy layer of virgin white; that resembled the look of a downy carpet. The first snow in this year.

We made haste towards the cab-draw-horse station. Luckily, the dorozki stand, (cabs drawn by horses) was not too faraway from our house, so it took no time at all to get there. Upon our arrival we immediately selected the first in the line cab, and rushed to the station. Now the snow was coming down all around us. My mother and I finally on our way were sheltered inside the dorozka. The hood of the dorozka was pulled over our heads above us, to protect us both from getting wet from the falling snow and plaid blanket was placed upon our laps to keep the warmth throughout our journey. Finally having this comfort in travel we felt a bit safer. All this camouflage; snow, hood and dorozka

made our detection impossible from the eyes of the curious. All this movement of ours was done with perfect timing. It was promptly 10 A.M. that our dorozka arrived at the railroad station. Visa-vis us I could see that another dorozka was already parked. From that dorozka's horse blasted a steam from his mouth which indicated that the vehicle had just arrived also. Someone jumped out of from the dorozka. I quickly recognized that it was my father. He made his way in our direction. As he approached our vehicle, he briefed us with a sad smile and said, "No emotion! " This sounded like warning. I felt danger. Because of war I had developed such a sensitiveness that I clearly understood my father's behave. In the meantime he quickly put on his overcoat which my mother had handed over to him. He discretely checked all around himself and his surroundings as he put his overcoat on. Fortunately this spot was deserted maybe due to the first snow fall .

"Don't move anywhere for, I will be back in only a minute" He said to my mother and me, he rushed to the nearest cashier's window. No more than a minute or two went by and he returned, holding in his hand the train tickets. Briefly he informed us;

" We are going to Warsaw. It will be much more safer there " He continued, " Warsaw is not included in the Third-Reich, as of that the Germans will not be so harsh to the Jews. Besides, many of our relatives have already escaped from Kalisz so far. Maybe it is better to stay with them altogether and wait till the end of war with them. The present situation in Kalisz is horrible and our life is at stake. I have to prepare you just in case; to take

precaution in dangerous situation.If someone should ask you; 'where you going?' Don't stutter or show your insecurity.With out any hesitation just say that we are going to visit our relatives. A positive answer with certitude will guarantee our security. our lives".

Shortly the train arrived on the platform ,and the locomotive's wheels, slowly came to a short jolt then came to a stop simultaneously spraying the last drops of vapor into the air. We climbed onto the train with hurried steps and took our seats inside within a comfortable pullman wagon.The section of our wagon wasn't packed to much with voyagers. Mixing in with Polish passengers and German soldiers , we felt as if we were swallowed up inside 'Mouth of a Lion' yet unexpectedly our fears began fade away.No one even paid any attention to us all the way to the terminal.Even though we had miraculously avoided most dangerous situation, we were still holding on within our souls a blood-chilling suspense due to the uncertainty of this journey's out come,This motion an extreme fear was so overpowering to each and everyone of us that it took control of our legs allowing them to tremendously tremble with anxiety as we arrived at the Warsaw station.

Warsaw ,a metropolitan city before the bombardment , was full of life. The cafes, restaurants and stores were always busy, and streets were mostly full of the most elegant promenaders. There was a tremendous amount of traffic which consisted of tramway, buses, taxis and hackneys(dorozki) , all racing about everywhere, running.. days and nights and roaring with life. The theaters, cinemas, museums,parks and other public amusements were always busy.Warsaw with its special look had been the pride of Poland. There was no city in this country that was more vibrant and sophisticated than Warsaw which pulsed in such manner. Yes, now this city was even more overpopulated but it didn't have the same rich noise one used to experience. Taxis disappeared from the busy streets and were confiscated for army use ,and the dorozki traffic had diminished. Tramway were in heavy usage, and German trucks and black limousines took place of the once heavy traffic of taxis and hackneys etc...

Many buildings were destroyed by German's plains bombardments Since the turmoil of war, the city 's image completely changed.Warsaw became gray and gloomy, full of Germans and unhappy people.The population grew heavier and heavier like the waves of a stormy ocean everyday overflowing the city with petrifying streams of new runaways. The rich sounds of a good life vanished almost as if someone cast an evil spell on the city. The streets of Warsaw were now, full of Jewish beggars,

not by profession but by circumstances. They were mostly old people or children; the first victims of misfortune. Standing in silence, shivering from cold and hunger, dressed meagerly, not knowing the art of begging, ashamed, deprived of their dignity, and so hopeless... They were the symbol of the Jewish fatality. There languished pale lifeless faces helplessly looking at the general populace with embarrassment and confusion. Some passerby tried to helping out thee poor lost battered souls by throwing a few pennies out to them, here-and -there yet, others who seemed to walk through streets hypnotised blindly absorbed in their very own sorrow and misfortune which was also such an enormous ordeal and predicament in itself that they became either immune to these creatures of pain and only passed them by or just became unaware of these victims of war,due to the same sight every day.

In Poland , the majority of the Jewish population lived in a close community .The main reason for it was for a self preservation existence, also discrimination of choice of real state .History demonstrated that before 1287 Jews had no right to purchase anything whatsoever just because they were Jews. For long, long time Jews could not possess land but they were allowed to rent(only in specified spots) .Jewish farmers had to rent land from the Polish Nobles at high princes.Therefore, living arrangement were quite difficult,economic grow was impossible and they remained as the lowest of lowest.To own their own home was unheard as up to a King Kasimir the Great they didn't even owned cemetery.It wasn't till King Kasimir the Great that life changed for some Jews for better.Under his rue, power and authority,this

king granted Jews the privilege and the right to purchase and acquire property, and also allowed of a purchase cemetery .

The other reason was why they reside in ghettos .In their own community They felt more secure, in dignity with out prejudices.They were as if behind an invisible curtain which could shelter them from unfriendly eyes, especially during the ritual of lighting the Sabbath candles being able openly rejoicing their holy days and holidays.Here there supported themselves and prospered. Because of great deprivation of education , they built themselves a religious school and hospital for the needy in their community. This community also carried on its shoulders a heavy burden as to take care of the sick, old and needy since Jewish people weren't subsidized by the government as others were. Their children rarely attended public schools due to the regulation enforced of the limited quota. So, for their safety and psychological comfort , families bonded together with their ethnic habits. Their synagogues and cultural centers were in close vicinity of their homes to avoid attacks, assaults and stone throwing of hooligans . Fundamentally ,these people were a peaceful nature, only dedicated to Almighty God and happy when they were assured of their safety and tranquility,many however did managed to live outside the ghetto in spite of the discrimination as they prospered and flourished and consequently they finally were able to buy property outside the ghetto to live in.

From the early days of war through German Authority the newly

arrived Jews were allowed to live in Warsaw, but only in the populated Jewish community which was designated for colonization.

After the bombardment which greatly hit Warsaw, there was a shortage of apartments. The magnitude of the influx of the over populated district was to the point of saturation. Lucky was the one who had somewhere to sleep. People were forced to accept any condition "willingly". Their choices were limited to the utmost within, in this restricted section. Also, even for the people living permanently in Warsaw, financial problems started to be strenuous. Most of the Warsaw Jews began renting their own apartments for extra income to anybody who could pay, or even shared their own apartments with their immediate family who fled from other towns.

Everyday there was a new flow of runaways who escaped from the burned towns and villages; from a sadistic suppression into the HAVEN of Warsaw. To secure a modest place to live in was almost impossible. Lots of families got together to share whatever they could with their family members. Others with no resources started to live on the streets.

My father and mother and I in the midst of this misery found those relatives of ours who ran away from Kalisz. There were eight of them. Two of my uncles with their families shared two small rooms and a kitchenette. The apartment was dilapidated. I was totally amazed by this bareness. Their poverty was embarrassing to me. The wooden floors were scrubbed white, the table was covered with a clean tablecloth, and the two

bedroom's iron beds were covered with sparkling clean bed sheets. Yes, it was kept clean nevertheless, it was depressing. I was thunderstruck with this clean poverty . Such a disastrous downfall! Yes, this was reality. There were eight of them living in such poverty and discomfort. Not too long ago, they were care-free, happy , prosperous and respectable people. It was so sad to see them in that stage." We have to" as they told us "It is only temporary"...

Luckily we had found a place to stay. There was a family willing to rent a very small bedroom to us. It was very small but very suitable .It was pure luck to be able to rent it especially in this over populated chaos.

We visited our relatives everyday. It was painful seeing them so dejected. Their humor changed as well as their manner of dress. No one wore a smile on his\her face. They were sad, bitter, and deadened by their grief. Once, they were joyful and full of life, now they looked tired, rejected and suddenly old. I had never seen them like this. This mournful image struck our hearts with ruefulness and anxiety. It was pitiful to see them at this stage! How sudden can entire lives of so many people be altered!

As we took a walk through the streets of Warsaw we looked at the started foundation of the ghetto wall a which one day would surround only the streets where Jews lived. According to the Germans the wall will serve to separate uncivilized , contagious , lunatics who were need asylum ,who were dangerous to the community and to the whole world;the degenerates, unable to

live as they are, and the enemy of the whole human civilization, the pest with the wrong type of blood!... The Jews!

The misfortune followed us like a shadow or a plague from which it was impossible to avoid. After a certain amount of days in Warsaw our "Kaliszian's identification" was changed to a different color (arm band). Since Warsaw did not belong to the Third Reich, Jews were ordered to wear a white band with a blue star of David instead of the yellow band (worn in Kalisz). So, what did we accomplished by moving?! In summary, nothing changed. It was only the repetition of a similar condition but at a later time. We sensed the inevitable, the situation which had occurred in Kalisz would also go on to happen in Warsaw...

Living conditions and constant German pressure were becoming more and more harmful to every one, moreover their tactic was different in the early days of occupation in Warsaw, compared with the one in Kalisz. At that time there were much less beatings, killings and expulsion from homes. For some time the Germans purposely were more careful in their behavior acting toward the Jews hiding their blood thirsty cruelty in order to gain peoples' confidence. In the beginning, they restrained themselves from their open terrorism, only playing for time to don't make big panic.

In the meantime this suppression was so severe that the Jewish people couldn't get jobs worsening their situation. We, my parents and I clearly sensed that we would be unable to survive with these conditions.

My father started to contact many people and was informed that the only one way to safety for us was, to escape to the Soviet Union. Talking and consulting with many people, he was enlightened by the possibility of trying to cross the frontier. "There are smugglers", they told him. "For money, they will smuggle people through the river Bug in to the Soviet Union" .

After having collected information necessary for travel we, my parents and I, called together a meeting with the rest of our family. We told them that we were planing to escape to the Soviet Union." Anything will be better than to stay in Warsaw" said my father. We begged the rest of our family to join us in this undertaking, but they refused. Both my uncles, businessmen, were afraid of the Communistic regime in the Soviet Union, remembering the consequences of the revolution. After my father's proposition a long silence followed, then one of my uncles replied, "It is a big decision to make. In Warsaw, we have a place to sleep and from time to time ,we are able to at least to do some odd and ends blue-collar job. It is sad to see our young children work for such a small piece of bread. I know that this isn't much . Food is scarce, but at least its keeping us alive. This is only temporary . How long can the war continue anyway? War time is always difficult!..... We will endure it.We will survive!" He stopped, then with tears in his eyes he turned to my father and told him with persuasiveness , "You Janek , you will have more of an advantage than we do. You have a skill and that is important. You will do well in that strange Communistic Russia! I doubt that over there

you will have a problem. Go! We will meet after the war..!"

We never saw them again...

ESCAPE FROM WARSAW

December had almost come to an end .The construction of the ghetto walls were in full swing. The epidemic of typhoid started to propagate. For us to stay in Warsaw any longer, would be suicidal .My father had made a decision that we had to go through the frontier to the Russian side. Perhaps we will be able to save ourselves from harm.

We collected the necessary information regarding our new adventure, and together in the company of my mother's two sisters who , one was a widow with her daughter , and the other was with her husband, had to leave Warsaw.

Our getaway was in the direction of the Soviet Union's frontier. Our guiding point was a small town Malekinja ,close to the river Bug, which divided the German and Soviet borders since 1939.

Life was too precious and we wanted to survive . To survive you had to try everything and anything you could do which could help. Once again we took our identification bands off from our garments and proceeded with our escape into a train , to another part of the world,a world, which was to us a complete mystery.But life was too precious and we wanted to survive and to survive you have to try everything that can help.

On our way to the frontier , the train unexpectedly stopped in the midst of nowhere the piercing loud speaker announced that the train will be detained for twenty minutes.

Being that we were in the last wagon of an extremely long train and the train stopping at a far distance from the station, we (the last wagon) were caught in the middle of nowhere even further removed compared to the front wagons. Therefore, we stepped out into this bare vast plain intersected with many rail-road tracks. As we had the twenty minutes to kill, we decided to take a walk to stretch our legs out. As we stepped off, out of our wagon I took in the which was fresh and crisp. The sun melted the remains of the early snow uncovering a big patch of the remaining yellow-green grass which was burnt by winter's frost. It was pleasant and peaceful to be in that stillness and crispiness of a nice December day as the sunlight peeked in here and there. I enjoyed this unexpected interruption, delighted with this unusual day, breathing and inhaling, taking inside my lungs this wonderful fresh air, when.... Suddenly, unexpectedly like a sudden flash a long train of cattle-cars came in from the opposite direction. The train stopped. The long cattle train was loaded up with people. Many human hands from the small cattle cars' windows protruded out of it. Hands looking for help... As the train stopped the doors rapidly opened up and German soldiers jumped out of them with their dogs. Even this early in time did we witness the acts of horror. People half dead had gathered around the doors and small windows of the cattle-cars- stretching their hands out, begging and screaming, "We are dying of hunger! Please- Have pity on us! A drop of water! Bread! Please a small piece of bread for my dying child! A little water for my dying mother!

Help! Please help us! My baby is dead! " The desperation was intensely horrifying. The screams for help were endless...and we were in shock, powerless and frozen with terror when we observed this atrocity.

In a matter of a split second out of nowhere, some good , courageous gentile women, probably from nearby villages rushed in frantically and offered whatever they could; containers of water or pieces of bread . These benevolent women were heroic, strange... For some reason the Germans overlooked these women. We thought we were hallucinating. This genuine vision of horror stopped shortly since the train took off with the same swiftness of velocity as it arrived . No one could save these maltreated people from their destination. In a minute ,in a second ,in a short moment, this sudden flash had vanished like unexpected lightning , just like a bad dream or hallucination from which it is not easy to awaken from . The dream of "reality".....Reality which was too difficult to conceal. But, our eyes were the camera that caught this moment of horror. The horror that we saw a minute ago was gone. The train left . There wasn't even a trace of this nightmarish incident. The kind women disappeared like angels in a fairy tale. There was only stillness and waste. But the extended hands and anguished faces of these men and women with their lamenting shrieks have never left me. I still visualize this scene frequently in my mind, the ghost of that part of my life; replaying flashbacks of horrifying screams its that were only for a short time yet to this day still ringing the echoes in

my ears. Even though, after so many years have gone by it is not possible to wipe it clean out of my memory ...

German spikes announced departure of our train. Benumbed, we reached our train.

It was late afternoon when we arrived at Malckinja. The snow had fallen heavily covering everything with a thick unpolluted white blanket of snow. The snow was so bright that it actually hurt our eyes.

The train station had like in every small town only a puny wooden barrack in the middle of nowhere. There, looking out as far as we could at this enormous whiteness which surrounded the station, our eyes reached only the horizon of white waste spread under the grayish sky with a rapidly growing overcast.

The station resembled some kind of a toy, which someone had stuck in the middle of a huge mass of snowdrift in the middle of an ocean of snow, slowly drowning inch by inch.

This forgotten landscape a distinctive cold picture, was undisturbed by the passersby or carriages. There, calmness predominated. It was unpleasantly cold, and.... so different, and so uninviting! The cold wind also penetrated right through our garments making us shiver even more so than we already were. Followed the instruction precisely that which my father previously received in Warsaw. In order to reach our designated destination and since additional travel was required to meet our smugglers, we took a sleigh and left the station. This big sleigh prearranged by the man in charge was already

waiting for us at the station. We climbed into it and our coachman covered our legs with a blanket. As we were on our way, it got darker and colder under a threatening sky. Shortly, the blanket covering our feet wasn't enough to keep us warm. We were just happy enough to be able to count each kilometer left behind us. We were fervently confident now that we would reach safety.

The horse trotted through the invisible, unplowed covered by heavy snow road, knowing it by heart, snorting loudly, moving swiftly without resistance. The sleigh soundly glided on the untouched snow, smoothly leaving two shiny polished parallel tracks behind us. The rails were the only marks on this deserted road. The old mare was running fast in accompaniment of joyful jingles coming from the small bells which were attached to her collar.

From afar emerged a contour of a small structure. We had gotten close to it. Our coachman informed us that "we will be passing a bakery. If you wish" he said; "we can stop there so you can do some shopping". "A bakery!?" We echoed joyfully and surprised. "This is like an Oasis in the Sahara-Desert!" screamed in my cousin.

"What a pleasant surprise!" My mother jumped in. What a perfect coincidence. We were famished due to the constant traveling of long distances with no opportunity to shop, avoid unnecessary exposure that would reveal us to the Germans. We were enormously hungry! In addition to our hunger, the journey seemed long and burdensome to us and on top of it all exhaustion from

traveling and being exposed to many hostilities on our way; we only expected to look for a warm corner to warm our tired bodies. ... But the unexpected bakery sounded so fantastic!...

This news about the bakery put us in a joyful mood, knowing that in the short time we will be able to eat. When we stopped there, my father and my uncle entered the bakery. My mom and I and the rest of the women remained in the sleigh guarding our baggage. The coachman fed the horse. We patiently waited for our men to return. Time started to drag on. We grew restless, worrying about their long absence.. At last, we saw the bakery door open wide and our men had come out of the store with their arms full of goodies, rushing towards our direction. They placed the bags full of bread and rolls on our laps and climbed into the sleigh. Then the coachman urged his horse to take off. Before opening up the bags, a pleasant smell permeated the air. We started to help ourselves with the food. The rolls were plump, tender, light brown, fresh and still warm with a strong striking aroma. There was such a variety! Especially the onion rolls, they were covered with small bits of chopped onion a specialty of Eastern Poland. I still remember them so vividly, obviously because I was so hungry. The volatilizing fragrance flowing in the air only increased our hunger.

The sleigh once again speed and the horse without any sudden jerks, spurt cheerfully pulled us out, loudly snorting along with the accompaniment of the merry jingles. The outside

of the horse's mouth was covered with particles of ice that came from the horse's drooled saliva which had been mixed in with his breath; a white cloud of warm vapor formed in this cold air. We indulged ourselves in this heavenly food and a blissful flood of warmth and pleasant feelings from the caloric intake or maybe from the inspiration for a new life, automatically pumped into our veins.

During our feast my father and uncle started telling us about the bakery: You can't imagine the amount of baked goods was in that store? And the more amazing was that the owner was a Jew! We engaged in a conversation with him. He was such a happy go lucky fellow. Amazingly though he sounded so frivolous and untroubled and a smile never abandoned his face".

My father took a mouthful of bread and continued; " we were surprised to see a happy Jew in these days. Then, I asked him;

Tell us dear fellow, what predicament are the Jews now in in your town? Why do you look so composed, and up to now way are you not kicked out of your bakery? Are you unaware what is happening? " Not waiting for his answer we told him in short, about our own experience of German cruelty, and the business-incident in Kalisz." " Do you have the slightest idea what kind of dilemma is facing all Jews? We are only trying to make you aware of what is happening. We can't believe this " DANGEROUS PARADISE! It seems like you are living in a different world!"

" Well" answered the owner; " The Germans, up to now are not bothering us too much. It is obvious that they now rule

us and we have to try to do only our best... Over here its' quite different from the Third-Reich. On our side of the country I believe, it will not be so harsh. The war isn't going to last forever. The Germans want only a piece of Poland. What difference does it make who will be dictator ? There always has been a persecution in Poland so, we have become accustomed to it by now. If not Polish persecution, so it will be German... In essence the dominator is the same. They all hate us anyways. ... But, we still live! Isn't it so ?... German soldiers always stop by my bakery . I give them fresh baked goods and up til now they don't annoy me. I also used to feed Polish Policja . He started to laugh .I only pay my dues. He stopped his narrative with a bright smile. We looked at each other in silence for a minute. "

This time for a change my uncle continued the story as my father took another bite of a roll. "Dear fellow! we said to him after a short pause' Atrocities always come when we least expect it. We also thought so about the Germans. But time has changed. They aren't human anymore . They are unlike those of the First World War. Back in our own home town we also looked the other way . It didn't help us at all. You are deluding yourself by this acquiesence. The begining is deceiving... But...It is true that we were the first victims of the swift "action" since we were in the annexed Third-Reich, but their cunningly sly tactics is already well known with their terror and terrorizing sweeps all over the country! Its' getting much worse even in Warsaw. Everything

German ... founded on perfidy. Be alert!" 'we told him'. "They are a bunch of bloody criminals and deviants. We don't wish you any harm, but one day they will come for you, when you least expect it and they will take you away! Be on guard! Be prudent! We wish you good luck, dear fellow ,perhaps you will be lucky!" ' We left him speechless'...

THE PLACE chapter 11

The threatening impending clouds looked as if a capricious nonchalant painter splashed entirely excessive large dabs of dark grey paint over the entire sky, outlining and emphasizing its heaviness. Darkness growing with increased intense velocity told us that in a fraction of a minutes upcoming storm was inevitable. Every minute it got darker and darker. The gloomy, sullen sky was soon covered completely with a weighty shroud warning us of the snow storm. The air got colder and crispier and the complete darkness of the forecasted night from its warnings completely overpowered the once luminous sky.

When we reached our designated place snow began slightly to fall. Its timing was right. We already numb became by its bitter cold temperature.

The sleigh came to a stop at a small, miserable, remote little shack. Quickly observing this area where we stood, we were able to catch glimpse without additional light, the brightness of the vast white snow so pure. Virgin snow stretched out beyond us as if it had been sowed with millions of tiny particles of glitter.

When we stepped down from the sleigh and began walking on top of the snow crunching noise under our feet echoed. We went in the direction. The smoke coming out from the chimney was the only indication that a living human being actually inhabited there, reassuring us that we were not cast away in a deserted place.

We went inside the shack. A "Russian" stove already lit

faced us as we entered in, it was , filled with burning wood , crackling noisily under the long , vividly dancing tongue of yellowish -orange flames.A kerosine lamp hung from the ceiling, dangling at each and every movement that the door would open as close bringing dull light.It gave a somber look to this place . On the rough , unwashed floor ,stood a few old naked benches made from pine , full of splinters. I don't recall whether or not there was something there more than that.The entire room looked dark and shabby. Everything was primitive.In this partial obscurity around this stove was a women who was absorbed in her work adding more wood to the fire. She didn't pay any attention to us as when we came into the room and did not even respond to our greetings.

Some moments later , two men showed up. Smiling, introducing themselves, they greeted us pleasantly, displaying their modest hospitality.They were our smugglers. After some trivial talk they collected money from us for the arrangement, justifying their choice of this uncivilized place being that it was the safest and nearest plce to the river. " Moreover" they said,: " This undertaking requires thorough planning and has to be the right night . This night today obviously shall not be considered.There will also be another small group of people who will join in with us and meanwhile, you have to stay here over night. Maybe tomorrow we will cross the river." They left smiling.

Suddenly, we realized that our lives were in their hands. It was too late to recondiser. And after all, what was there to

consider! Did we have any another choice? To go back?...

We laid down on the hard narrow benches covering ourselves up with our own overcoats as blankets. We used our bundles for pillows.

The next morning we got up with aching pain all over our bodies. We spent whole day inside this shack(For a precaution we were not allowed to go outside) We finished up eating our baked goods and in the evening, we had baked potatoes for supper, the hospitality of the shack .By late evening, the two men reappeared and informed us that we should be ready tonight to cross the river. They said in short,:" This night is perfect " . In addition they requested complete silence during this operation, as any conversation will be dangerous. We had to have total trust in them. Tonight we shall cross the river at midnight. Then they added,:" This night the Germans will be in dip sleep when we will cross the fronteer it will be a piece of cake."

It was the Eve of the New Year ,the end of 1939. I will never forget this night; the night of the planed escape which we awaited for with such hope, emotion full of trust.This particular night was so pitch black, cold, snowy, windy and unpleasant.It was perfect night to be indoors and to sleep in a clean warm, cozy bed, and dream of something nice. Oh, how that would have been so perfect.! 'How long has it been since I slept in my own bed?'...I asked myself. We were already dressed in our overcoats waiting for the arrival of our smugglers. Sitting bundled up, waiting, ready to go ,we were lost in our thoughts, full of mixed emotions. Many reflections passed in our minds and many questions disturbed us.We were unaware of the complexity of the situation .Remembering our sweet , comfortable home that we left behind us brought more emotional pain upon us. We felt that our vagrant life lost meaning. We didn't feel human anymore. This was our only chance to be far away from German cruelty. The only way out for us was to run away and get out out of this "Hell " . We couldn't go back! This was it.... To go back anyways was too late. In any case, going back ;was to be killed off by the Germans.We had to take this chance!....

Since we were stil deep in our thought we didn't even realize that the midnight passed long time ago.Suddenly ,the

~~ago~~. Suddenly ,the crunching sound of snow under someone's marching feet drew near our direction.

The door rapidly swung open, and there appeared a smuggler's head . "Everybody ready ? " He asked. "Hurry make haste and follow me" He ordered , rushing away from the shack. We left our refuge as fast as we could and began to walk following our leader. The walk was difficult and rough. We were in the darkness of the night and the whiteness of the snow. All around us was only endless snow reaching out to the black night's horizon as if a nightmare. Yesterday's snow fall from the blizzard created very deep mounds or snow drifts which still hadn't ended yet. The wind blow maliciously ,making these drifts fluctuate waves of the most high. In some spots it was so deep that it was even difficult to pull your legs up and but from the big fluffy loose heaps without a struggle . And,as we struggled with this snow and wind, the draft with a furry would swept us down and up to the surface and then painfully hit our faces and block our view. At a certain point on this horizon without borders, a dark spot moved towards us. Approaching us fast, the spot grew bigger and bigger .When it finally reached us, we at last recognized a small group of people, a party of more or less than ten , who had merged with us, with their leader at the front... our second smuggler. They joined us in silence, without an introduction.

We had to keep going , floundering in deep drifts of snow, following our guides.

I was the youngest and the smallest in the group, so the walk for me was even more difficult and painful for me. To extricate myself from this difficulty, I chose to use the footprints previously made in the snow ; the remaining tracks before me already forged by the people ahead of me. That didn't help much either. The holes were so big that I kept losing my equilibrium , but I quickly corrected my slips and rose up perspiring from struggling and mad because of my own clumsiness, and since I didn't want to slow down the procession I restrained myself from crying , constantly reminding myself to be brave , reserving myself and pushing back my personal feelings, knowing the gravity of this enterprise. To me it was obvious that this adventure was our jumping board to safety. I used every muscle in my body to keep up with everyone.

Our eyes had become accustomed to the shadows. We approached a black , broad, extensive contour. Getting up close, we faced a great forest on the edge of the river that spread far out. We rushed to it as quickly as we could realizing that the forest was a coverup, an umbrella for us and would hide our presence from the eyes of the German patrols.

The forest was enormous! The trees tall, old and majestic were decked with snow like a blanket of rabbit fur. It seemed as if I was in a make believe world. It was an odd feeling. It felt as if I had dreamed it all up.

We went deeper and deeper into the forest. Inside , like the outside ruled a grave silence. There too , the snow covered the ground with a heavy undisturbed surface of white fluff. Icicles

hung from trees and the wind didn't attack us anymore. In that serious moment ,I couldn't ignore my imagination . Everything to me was like a Fairy-Tale.It was so beautiful that I was mesmerized and still dreaming. And then I heard a short pitch whistle perturbing all this extreme silence brining me back from my dream. I quickly glanced at our group walking up ahead.

' No!' I said to myself,: 'Nobody would be doing this! We all are fighting for our lives! We were told to be silent! No-one will take the liberty to whistle during this moment that his life is on the line! Could it be birds? No... ! This is also impossible! On a frosty night no birds whistle!' I struggled with my thoughts, confused, not sure of the reality of this event. I wanted to share my doubt of what I thought I heard with someone but remembering my obligation 'to retain my mouth shut' I knew that to do so would be a faux-pas. Therefore, I kept this issue of question to myself.

But, no more than a few minutes later,I heard it again and this time ,I was sure that it actually took place-no more skepticism. Two short high- pitched whistles blew .Then one followed the others resonating like an echo... but it wasn't an echo! The people absorbed in the escape weren't paying any attention to this only continuing to further forge ahead to advance or...then agean ...maybe my young, sharp hear that sound and picked up on it - beins sensitive to it?...

My mother walked beside me .I couldn't keep my mouth shut anymore.I couldn't resistt opening up. Whispering, I turned to

her "Ma, someone's whistling ! I believe it sounded as if someone was trying to communicate with us . It sounded strange, like a pass-word". But, my mother only looked at me irritated and replied "Hush! You're imagining it ! You better be quiet and..." She didn't quite finish her sentence that suddenly, unanticipated , we had stopped horrorified....

In shock and in dismay, we were surrounded by Germans!. They appeared from nowhere. Standing there, with their determined look, they were ready to kill us with their rifles pointed at us and loudly shouted in German;" Freeze! Hands up! If anyone moves , we will shoot! " We surrendered. What was in everyone else's mind I didn't know but I comprehended with my young mind that we were betrayed and deceived by the smugglers and handed over to the Germans...

Our leaders had disappeared....

We segregated into two groups ; Women and men. Then, led by the surrounding arms still pointed at us,we were escorted like dangerous element . They conducted us to a wooden house in the middle of the forest, previously, the Forest house .They pushed us in .There was a long hall of rows, temporarily assembled cabins.Singled out , we were assigned to each cabin and was ordered to remove our garments completely off to dispose off them on the stool which was prepared for inspection.The unheated room was very cold .We all shivered. In a short time,a large woman appeared at the door, holding a big lantern. She began inspecting our clothing, searching for some hidden valuables, which could have been sewn into some one's garments.

In wartime , many people did hide their last financial resource in their clothes and even inside their own body . They would take any measure to ensure security for their life.

After having finished checking for hidden treasures, she also inspected our mouths and rectals. Then, after this scrupulous, disgusting examination we were allowed to get dressed .

At the same time that the women were put in the Foresten house, the men were sent to the horse stable ,full of horse-manure ,invaded with rats.

Following the completion of the thorough checking, the women were transfered and remained in an adjoining room.We didn't know what was next... It was already day-break when the Germans moved the women out of the house leading them outside and at the same time , the men were escorted out of the horse-stable . When the men and women were reunited, the women noticed that the men had been badly beaten up. As a result of the rough beatings, their eyes had black and blue rings and some of them would still wipe the blood off of themselves that was running out of their mouths because of missing, knocked out teeth,leaving their faces swollen... Later, we found out that they took my father's new shoes off his feet as someone of them had their eyes on them. My father had just bought a special pair just recently in Warsaw for himself to equip him properly for the upcoming Russian winter, taking into consideration that there could be the inconvenience and the possibility of a colder winter there compared to the winters

experienced in Poland. He wanted to prepared himself for any weather condition since he was the bread- winner. He was very fortunate that he also packed his old pair of shoes in his suitcase. Otherwise, since the Germans were wicked and couldn't care less about my fathers condition, he would have wounded up walking barefoot on the snow.

Our plundered luggage shrunk in size and was returned to us without our valuables. Everyone was robbed of their best, in particular gold and silver, confiscating the rings off our fingers as well as our family herilooms or valuable religious articles.

To our surprise, we were convoyed to the edge of the river by the Germans. On the shore floated two canoes already anchored. The morning sky was milky. . This uncompleted, pale, hazy space known as the sky created an illusion as if it slowly flowed and melted together with the background of the vast snow just like ice cubes floating on top of water , giving you the impression that the long River Bug was one unit. It was an emotional and exhausting night. The cold had attacked us severely. This faded panorama and chill felt as if one was living in an " Ice land". The water in the river was still and stift du to the frost as it ignored the blowing wind .

All you could see in this river was only the two canoes which were bouncing about in the water, being blown by the wind with each puff put forth.

Our two leaders suddenly appeared before us. They looked well rested. A German policemen of higher rank gave the two leaders

permission as well as a sign to dismiss us and to lead us to the other side of the river. It was hard to beleive this change of fate. Moments later we were in the canoe leaving the German's occupied ground, in the direction of the Russian frontier. It was so confusing....

'HA, Ha, HA' laughed violently these Germans behind us with their outburst ."HA,Ha,Ha" they burstedout, " you are now going to HEAVEN"....

There was approximately seventeen of us altogether. The two canoes were the vehicles that would transport us to safety. Each of the canoes had their leader-smuggler as their head.I was in the canoe with about ten others, with my mother and father. As we taked seats in the canoe , our men feverishly grabbed the oars and started to row with passion and vigor. Everyone of us was silent.We could only hear the energetic rhythm of the plunging of the oars, splashing and cutting the ice water. The river was calm and cold. We glided fast through this cold darkened surface in spite of the penetrating chill with a stamina as well as with a controlled regatta, leaving behind us a river pass traveled and looking like a dark, shiny, wide strip of polished cast iron.

We were only a short distance from reaching the upcoming coast, when suddenly our leader without any reason abruptly ordered us to stop rowing.Our leader brazenly refused to get on shore and categorically insisted that we vacate the canoe.Therefore , we were to be left in the water. "Now! everyone out! Here is The Russian Haven !" He screamed out with

hatred pointing to the coast."That is it! This is were I draw the line! We aren't going any further!" Yelled our malignant smuggler. "You have to vacate this canoe!"

We were in consternation. 'To vacate the canoe,' meant to jump into deep ice water.It was so dreadful. This was another act of sadism from the Poles.At that particular moment, I recalled the comment that was made by the baker of Malkinja from the story my father told us on the sleigh ride from the bakery." So,what's the difference! Sadism is sadism, it's international!. ..." But to jump in this river now was to commit HARAKIRI. Our men stopped rowing and looked at one another in disbelief. "This is absurd ! What a mockery!" Their eyes exchanged glances. They knew that they had nothing to lose whether they fought this time, since the Germans weren't around anymore.

" Be reasonable please! " one of the men tried to persuade the leader " We have a pregnant woman in the canoe! We can't go in this icy water! Some of us can't swim.. You are being irrational!" But our smuggler-leader was unmoved.At this point we knew that there wasn't any other alternative but to strike.

As if he was commanded to, one of the men from the group, stood up with determination and raised his oar right above the smuggler's head and in a calm, but forcible voice he declared: "If you attempt to complicate our safety ,I will split your head with this oar ! Don't try to do anything this time -you.... will be in danger! This time.... you are one against all of us." This all happened in my canoe.

The bold leap subdued our traitors and they obeyed us to continue on ahead. We were shocked by our leader's reaction of instantaneously, unexpectedly changing heart. Unwillingly with frenzy, they reached the coast with us and in a split second when the last one of us, cleared out of the two boats, they quickly disappeared rowing back at of sight.

We were left in the emptiness of this snow. Where our eyes roamed snow was the only thing we saw. Snow and nothing but snow... The sky and the white ground merged into one and the snow started to fall with heavy flakes. There wasn't any trace of a house or a tree, nor human life.

Is this the right place?... Where are we?... We didn't know where we were! Is this again another sort of treason?... We were so confused in our desperation that our brain didn't work properly. We started to have doubts if we were in the right side of the river. We panicked. Maybe we are still in Germans' hands!... It affected our nervous system. What shall we do?... In what direction should we go?... To the right? To the left? We were totally disturbed and distraught!

We started to move on forward, advancing and calling out for help, but only an echo would reverberate.

The snow was up to our knees by now and even much higher. The walk therefore became tougher and dragged us down. The slow movements couldn't provide sufficient heat for our exhausted bodies and we began to freeze from the cold. The women were at the stage of hysteria. Some acted in desperation and tossed

themselves on the snow spasmodically sobbing, and some were even yelling and refusing to continue further. We lost complete sense of direction. We were surrounded only by the white-bluish snow and white-bluish sky.... without any sign of life... We were already covered with a layer of fresh snow flakes...

RUSSIAN AMBUSH chapter 13

Suddenly, like unexpected thunder from a snowy sky, like a bolt of lightning, Russian soldiers surrounded us with a horrifying bewildered shout of; " Hands up! We will shoot! Hands up! Go back from whence you had came ! Retreat! We will shoot!" From where they came from ,it was impossible to tell, only that "The scene was deja vue"... We knew that this was not a mistake. Their faces were fierce without emotion as if chisled out of stone. They directed their arms at us. How exacerbatng was our situation. It was only a repetition in different outfits. Their uniforms were very dissimilar from the Germans. Contrary to the crisp German look, the Russian soldiers looked disheled and wornout. Their army hats had spikes sticking out of them . Their army cloaks a dull olive were worn out and tired looking, torn and faded and looked like rags hanging on them. They weren't shaven and they lacked vigor, but they stood firm in their positions..

We stood deep in snow with undescrabable terror lifting our hands up, frozen, tired, desperate, hopeles and resigned

,watching them point their arms at us. We started to believe that our lives had now finally come to an end. We felt like a two legged animal trapped in a cage, unable to escape.We were passive and we were ready to accept the possibility that our life was to be terminated.We were indifferent and too tired to run. To run?.... Where were we to run? There wasn't a place to run to! We were tantalized and baited.Either this way , or another way ,we could only expect our end.It was not worth continuing our martyrdom. We were at the end of our rope.It had to be our destination! Everything we strived for , was beyond our reach.

" Please! We beg you!", My uncle called out to them in his perfect Russian." Don't shoot us and don't return us to the Germans! We just escaped from their threats and abuse ! If you insist that we must return to them , then our answer is we shall not retreat. You can only shoot us to shorten our suffering."

The soldiers stared at us for a long time with mistrust. A silence prevailed for a short time.They finally softened. Still ,with grimaces like that of iron masks on their faces , they silently lead us to their outpost. We were surprised but still not sure as to what would happen .

We were happy and overwhelmed for this turning point ,that the extra walk on the slightly beaten snow-path was no exertion for us whatsoever and we were intoxicated with such a joyful moment. 'Yes,we were still alive! They let us live !' We walked onn as if on clouds and we had wings attached to us

,practically flying in the mid-air.

After a few hours of formality and interrogation we were placed on a train , to "Liberty"

Our first abutment was Kovel.

We arrived in Kovel, to an ancient town in the Ukraine, which up to 1939 was a part of Poland. Now it was under the Soviet occupation. It was unlikely to see the Kovel station strikingly boiling over with crowds. People were rushing out from over-packed trains, weighted down by the heaviness of their suitcases, boxes, and bundles. Some were carrying children on their arms and some were at their sides surrounded by the youngsters. Young and old alike were rushing from the station to the streets. It was as if you were inside a beehive. Loud conversations, laughter, cries, swears, rushing about, calling names out and whatever.... This had become the every day image in this uninteresting, murky Kovel station.

..But to us, this atmosphere of dear liberty was wonderful. The crowd, the noise, the agitation, everything was so awesome. Stripped from the German yoke of subjugation, my heart screamed out with emotion. "Here we are! Here we have everything behind us! There are no Germans! We constantly would repeat this to ourselves. No-one will kill us!", whispered the wind penetrating through the open wagon door; ready to let us out. We got down from the wagon steps with a sensational feeling. Our happiness overwhelmed us. The wonderful feeling of freedom and to be alive was more than a satisfying nourishment to our aching hearts. Going through that which we had survived and that we horrid was already behind us. We now felt uplifted and free as butterflies..

... But after having experienced this first wonderful feelings came a new feeling of being caught in a dilemma. Here , we were on our own. Where were we to go?.. To whom were we to turn to?..

We left our one baggage in storage and observed the crowd watching what they would do. We then followed the flow. We exited the station and went out onto the street. The streets were full of people ,so many people!...From where did they come from?.....

People from every part of Poland and mostly from the west ran from German cruelty and escaped their homes in masses, coming to this tattered old town looking for shelters.

Kovel , was in this perimeter, one of those towns that had the greatest agglomeration of runaways which was created during the time of 1939 when Poland was attacked, not only from the west, but from the east, and divided between the Germans and the Soviet Union.(The Malta pact.)

Kovel was an unpleasant , primeval town. The streets were narrow and were paved with cobble stones. The houses looked shabby, built narrow, had a grey color to it as was monotone in color and uniformity. Even the the small and narrow stores were also dull and pitiful. The people too were colorless as the city itself. There wasn't anything appealing about this town. A typical old city, bursting from the overflow of a vast number of refugees.

Yes,we were lost in this human ocean. They were mostly Jews, the lucky

ones, able to runaway from Hitler's hands. I will call them "lucky" as they were able to escape, but , were they really lucky? Not many! Of those who did escape many of them died from deteriorating health due to bad habitating conditions such as to mention a few ; typhoid , dysentery and malnutrition. And the one part of those who were able to survive, were killed off at the time of the German's aggression in 1941, and the others... I will tell you of them later.

We decided that it would be best for us to stay here, in Kovel for a period of time , to obtain the necessary information regarding the possibility of remaining here . We started to look for an apartment or hotel yet we had no success. All the rooms in possible available places had been rented out...Hotels were overcrowded, even the ones which had the worst of conditions. The situation had become desperate....

Finally, someone offered to rent us a "room" as an apartment for our usage which had been once previously used as laungry shed by the past tenants who lived in the big cort-yard of this surrounding houses .We rented it in desperation. This shed was at the far corner courtyard surrounded by tall stone houses. This dingy one room shed wasn't insulated against the winter's cold. But at least there was a window in it... although no electricity ran through it. The wooden floor was rough, full of splinters, grey and never washed. In the corner stood a kitchen stove which was used for boiling laundry. In Europe , many countries, did the laundry by boiling it this way. This was a ritual a part of washing; to sterilize and clean

the most stubborn of stains from their linen. A separate shed was used for this purpose and was to be set apart from the rental apartments as a designated area of doing laundry, to prevent the steam from reaching the apartments. Boiling steam from laundry was overpowering like a steam bath, therefore everyone used the communal laundry shed. Now, this laundry room had become our home.

This solitary opportunity that came up to rent was considered just plain luck. Due to space shortage there wasn't really any other choice in this turmoil and we accepted this offer.. This was how proprietors made their extra income.

Then there was question of how will my family and my relatives sleep in that crummy little place? My father was crafty with his hands and decided to build bunk beds of three levels.. He bought lumber goods and in a days work our three small families(my family and my relatives) finally had a place to sleep. The bed, if you can call it a bed, was made of three levels of primitive shelves made from rough, unfinished, pine wood and bedded with straw. But each family had their own level. This was considered quite a luxury!

The top level bunk bed was where I slept with my parents. There was slight heat during the day from the stove but, at night for economical reasons, we didn't keep it lit. The day's warm air melted the icy walls which were unable to dry during the daytime, creating moisture. At night, the walls and ceiling's moisture changed to a shiny frost producing glitter and a snowy crust. For light, we used a candle stick which had

been used only when necessary ... We pinched every penny as we didn't have any additional income and what we accrued started to dwindle away.

One of those nights as I climbed onto the top level of the bunk bed ,my mother held a lit candle in her hand so as to prevent my falling. I saw my parents' faces, uneasy and worrisome in this light which reflected on them so deeply. I wanted to console them but I couldn't find the right words for it.

What could I say ? No-one was speaking. Everyone was sad and gloomy. I thought to myself, maybe I can make them smile a bit. It won't be much but... As I climbed into our bed looking at the frozen walls with horror, I said; " Ma,look how beautiful the walls are in the candle light! They look like they are covered with shimmering and gleaming diamonds and pearls! It is so pretty! Let us imagine that we are in an enchanting grotto!"

Instead of making them smile I magnified their sadness. There was only silence. I knew that my pleasantry was out of place and was very immature of me. I wanted so much to ease their grieving. Laying in this cold darkness between my parents, covered with eider-down; the only comfort from the past,I held back my tears.We cuddled with one another to keep the warmth and we fell asleep.

It was very difficult to live in Kovel. Work was not available, nor was there any possibility to hold onto a normal way of living.

We sold every little thing that was precious to us, including my parents' engagement and wedding rings, which we miraculously saved from German robbers; by baking the rings within a bread and cutting it into a half to make it look inconspicuous, as if nothing was there.

After a persistent job hunting search, my father finally took a part-time job in a windmill as his last resort. He was temporarily in charge of rebuilding broken, mechanical parts. That for us, was a great relief. Due to that, we could eat once a day in "the" inexpensive cafeteria without the feeling that it would be a burden to the family's expenses. To prepare meals or to cook for ourselves, in the laundry room caused hardship and was also impossible since cooking pots and dishes weren't available.

The small cafeteria meal wasn't satisfying every time, but the feeling of being independent and being able to provide for ourselves was great.

We could stay in this cafeteria for as long as we wanted to, drinking tea and listening to the orchestra play.

This cafeteria for the "commoners" was well known in town. The dining room was huge and was surrounded by many tall, narrow windows. Inside it was filled with many little tables, always occupied by the refugees. There, they would sip their tea and

Dis cows

discuss daily situations and would listen to the music as well. This was their escape from the cold ,uninviting streets and their crowded shelters . The image these people portrayed was melancholic, as many of them were torn apart from their families. At the end of each day ,many of them took away with them containers of tea ,to have at least some kind of liquid to wash their teeth and faces with at home; since they did not not have any running water available to them in their shelters, moreover their habitation was deplorable and their residences lacked any sanitary facilities.

As you would enter this enormous dinning area, to the right in the corner stood an outstanding band , which played indefatigably. They performed many popular Russian songs, particularly a new Soviet edition of " Katyusha" and many new army songs. The public was enthusiastic, constantly applauding the band.The band played on and the musicians sang in their native language, overwhelmed by their success. The music was uplifting, narcoticizing everyone. Even though the words they had been singing in Russian were incomprehensible to everyone, the melodies and the rhythm had been so exuberating, that the musicians spurred them on,and they forgot their sorrows for that time being. They needed that nourishment for their souls as everyone of them were blue.Its effect was that of a fresh breath; like air blowing at their psychological wounds of desperate refugees. For a while it did work on them in a way like Balsam does. At least for those few hours they could forget their worries, their misery... and their reality, this trifle

bit.

The situation in Kovel worsened every day. The lines for free soup from the town's emergency kitchen were enormous. People with no income were hungry. I remember that I waited in line with a container for pea soup a few times myself.

The Soviet authority offered the refugees the opportunity to emigrate to a Russian country. This powerful promising propaganda spread wildly amongst the refugees.

They guaranteed good jobs and a good living condition inside of Russia with only one stipulation only; namely to accept a "voluntary" Soviet citizenship or to be returned to the hands of German's. For us to accept this threatening proposition was for very emotional. Our country was Poland. Despite the hatefulness toward us, we had ardently loved our country and we were its proud citizens. It was an emotional battle to fight our delicate predicament. My father served in the Polish Army and fought Russians in War World 1 which caused him to lose his one eye, but the last events of this German cruelty, was even more haunting to us. Political uncertainty was dreadful. Staying longer in town and facing starvation and an upcoming epidemic, which could breakout at any time, was also horrifying. Painfully, we had chosen to escape into Russian territory. Anyways, the Russians had menaced the runaways by threatening them to send everyone of them who would not accept their INVITATION, by returning them back to the Germans. We were well acquainted with German maltreatment and took the warning seriously. We chose to

accept their offer. Our consolation was hope and trust in our providence that the war would soon be over and no matter what, we would return to our homeland.

Later, it turned out to be that these people who had refused the proposition have been sent in to Siberia, the coldest spot in Russia as dangerous political criminals of Soviet Union. They were deported there, living in labor camps where a great many number of them died.

JOURNEY TO THE SOVIET UNION

chapter 17

We started our journey to the Soviet Union! Full of hope, trusting in the future ,we with our belongings gathered together with several other families and collected on the station's platform .The winter's cold attacked us with its full fury.

The freight-wagon was already stationed there , waiting for us with our own personal guide.

Shortly afterwards, a Soviet official and a translator showed up and greeted everyone of us warmly but at the same time made excuses as to why the only cars that were available , were freight -wagons for the time being, since passenger trains going to Russia , they said, "were overloaded".Knowing that, we were anxious to get going . Because we had recently experienced many hardships,struggling to survive, we accepted without hesitation one more discomfort. What mattered to us most was not how we would travel,but that we would finally reach our destination.Our vagabondage situation had been so desperate that for us, the most vital and counted the most was to have the promise of a clean bed and to have something to eat.

As for our freight wagon,ours was fairly clean.Installed in the middle off it was a wood\ coal stove with a large supply of broken planks. Seats didn't exist , so everyone made themselves comfortable by lounging around the hot stove on the bare floor.The heat from the stove warmed our bodies and we felt good, warmed in that

cold winter weather. We got acquainted with the new passengers those who we shared our destiny with, and we made ourselves at ease chatting away with each of them and discussed the inevitability of future possibilities a head of us. Time pleasantly passed away enough during the journey in the train. There were discussions, small talk, gabbing, singing, the telling of anecdotes, as well as possibility of sleeping. But beyond these things we carried with us the fervent hope for a better future. We were hopeful that our new lives would be removed far away from the peril of war. The journey on the train become burdensome and finally after many hours we at last eventually arrived in the city of Orel.

Orels' architecture was even more ancient than that of Kovel. The side walks in some streets were so narrow that only two people barely could walk together, side by side.

Our Russian guide lead us to the shopping area since our food supply had been eaten away. The long stop at the Orel station allowed us to further explore two shops. It was a great distance into town from the station. Cramped in the freight-wagon and overheated, we were glad to take the long walk able to stretch our legs and breathe fresh air.

Obviously, our first stop was the bakery. It was a narrow, small store with light brown shellacked shelves on the extended wall, full of loaves of bread. We were delighted to see such a plentiful bake supply to which we were accustomed in abundance to it in Poland. Seeing it in this modest store overwhelmed us by the sight of the

enormous variety of bread loafs and flabbergasted by it as well. According to our guide's suggestion who warned us that this would be the only opportunity for us to shop along on our way, we bought enough fresh bread to supply ourselves for the rest of our trip.

We also visited the other store which only sold fruit-preserves and honey. As the stores were neighborly, our guide encouraged us to shop there also. To our surprise, the preserves and honey were sold there only by gallon palleys. In essence, we didn't need so much but having received money for our food expenses from our sponsors and encouraged by our guide, we decided to purchase them anyway. Leaving the store we couldn't stop giggling, as for us in gallon palleys were not a usual manner to buy condiments. Alas, we were too naive to understand that all of it was only a propaganda.

In excellent spirit, optimistic and happy with the purchased goods, and very reassured that we were going to the country overflowing with food, we returned to our train, laughing at the unsophisticated way the sale was conducted in Soviet's Union. On our way back, we stopped at the train station, where we got boiling water (kipiatok), a customary travelers' necessity at every station in Russia.

To satisfy our hunger, we ate our meal sumptuously. It was a very sweet feast which consisted of bread with honey and bread with preserves and... of course the kipiatok. The nectar from this food soothed our aggravated disposition, calming our impatience due to the tedious wait for our detained departure. Ignored by the railroad control, as we

represented the least important cargo, we tolerantly awaited to be attached to the friendly locomotive.

GUS - HRUSTALNYI

We finally reached the "Promised land" in Moscau's district. The name of that small town was Gus-Hrustalnyi, translated to "Crystal-Goose." This establishment employed many people. When we arrived there we learned that we were patronized by them also.

Outside the station a row of sleighs waited for us. Few, were already crammed with everyone's leftover possessions, and some were empty ready to transport us.

Lots of snow was there too and it was extremely cold. The vapor from our breath surrounded us with a steaming, humid cloud. We rushed to the sleigh.

We were enthusiastic and bewildered by our sponsor's caring attitude for us. We were covered with a heavy blanket in the big sleigh. It was fun to ride and listen to the bells attached to the horse's collar and to listen to everyone of its movements and to inhale the dry, ice-cold, fresh unpolluted air. The sleigh impetuously pulled by horses, silently and smoothly, floated on the solitary vast snow like a large bird. After so much suffering and disappointments we felt relieved and were now optimistic. During this pleasant trip, we marveled at such a noble gesture coming from the Russians in displaying

such a nice treatment. We were even more overtaken and impressed when we stopped at a cafeteria. This great facility has been prepared just for us. It was a clean and extensive place arranged with many square tables seated for six. Everything was simply done, yet pleasant. The tables were covered with bright crispy new, red and white checkered tablecloth. White paper napkins were neatly arranged in tall drinking glasses. Warmth embraced us in both manners. The heated room made us feel good after sledding in freezing weather and the way how they welcomed us with their open arms, it was more than we could have expected, and it would not be enough to say, that we were overwhelmed with such a treatment. We were in ecstasy.

Having finished consuming our simple, good and plentiful early supper, we looked out through the cafeteria's windows and to our surprise we had noticed that outside the cafeteria behind the windows a crowd of Russian people stared at us with special interest as if we were supernatural. Their look of curiosity was very strange to us. Their eyes followed us and examined us in every detail, making us feel uncomfortable. Why were they looking at us with such curiosity? I doubted that they took us for extraterrestrial creatures. We didn't look as if we came from another planet... Astonished at their behavior, we discussed amongst ourselves this occurrence for a long time. This strange behavior puzzled us and we tried to find the reason as to what was the justification for this inquisitiveness. This continued for as long as we were treated. Each day it was when the time to be seated at the tables, these same people appeared

at the cafeteria's window once again staring at us. As the days passed by, we finally learned that the main attraction was not of a personal nature but that of the food which was being served to us. It was impossible for us to know that, this act of curiosity existed only because there was a shortage of victuals in this country. The native people were looking into our dishes...not at us. Generally speaking, it appeared that in the Soviet Union there was a shortage in everything. When we expressed our anxiety to our hostess, they justified the shortage as a normal symptom of to the war with Finland. "It will get better" they told us. But these native Russians told us that shortages existed even that way in peaceful times...

After supper the sleighs carried us to our new home designated by the Glass Foundry. With our stomachs full as well as being happy, we looked at the snowy roads with curiosity as we passed small wooden houses along the way. Everything was new to us in comparison to our Poland the brick built town. Finally, pleasantly surprised, when we arrived we faced a big red-brick building which protruded on the empty street. It was hardly finished. It was a block of modern apartments for the privileged workers at the Foundry; the members of the Communistic Party. Other workers were not so privileged to this quality of living. We were really impressed. It was such a blissful feeling to be able to have such a clean habitation. One room in various sizes had been assigned to newcomers. An average family up to four members received one room. A bigger family that of more than

four were granted two rooms. We, being small, received one room. The rooms were separated by a nice sized corridor. The two additional rooms were occupied by Russian neighbors. So in essence, these were the three rooms in the apartment but due to the shortage(even in apartments) they were divided as such. The kitchen was communal. The bathroom was unfinished .The bath-tub was installed and consequently served as a bed having being lack of rooms and was occupied by a Russian mother with her newborn baby. We also had one lavatory to be share with neighbors living in the same floor .Our designated corner room , only for the three of us, was in the shape of a square and had two big venetian windows and had walls painted white. There were three narrow iron beds painted also white and had straw mattresses equipped with complete bedding. There was also a table with three chairs and immediate necessities such as; dishes, pots and a few pans and adequate silverware and glasses. In the corner room there was a small table with an accessory for washing hands and faces. At the back door was even a small rectangular mirror. They thought of every detail. Every article was of inferior quality, yet new. We appreciated for the way they made us feel. Our expectation dazzled us. For our group as refugees, this was a special tribute. Everyone of us, emotionally broken and eager to possess our own nest was overwhelmed by this reception. At that time we were very grateful to the Russian people. It was a motherly gesture. Everything; the look of the white fresh painted walls, the warm, unexpected reception, the heat in the house and the early morning sunshine looking through the window, admiring

our glowing brand new home, filled our radiant hearts with tremendous gratitude. What more could they do for us? We got a week of orientation, to be acquainted with the new country and the new situation and of course... its surroundings. This whole week , twice everyday we were magnanimously driven from our homes to the cafeteria back and forth only designated for us.

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But, just as every splendor reaches their limit , our honeymoon had to also eventually come to a end.

Naturally it was clear to us, (we comprehended) that everyone who came with this group would eventually receive a suitable job for themselves.

My mother and father were assigned to the Glass Foundry. They were looking forward towards their first working day with much excitement. I remember that morning when they were ready to go to the foundry.. Their enthusiasm was so great for this first working day that they went full of zest, with vigor and spirit , animated to start a new life with new jobs , full of gratitude to our benefactors.

But, when they returned home from their work, they were fatigued and unhappy. They already grew gloomy. They were assigned to hard labor which required strong physical strength with muscles. Their work demanded to consistently supply coal to the constantly spouting hot foundry furnaces. The work was extremely oppressive and after a few days of that burdensome labor , my mother collapsed at work. My parents felt guilty by disappointing their sponsors, but the work was unbearable. Because of this incident at work, my mother was allowed to change her work and she joined a seamstress's shop. My father persuaded the administration that rather than keeping him as a furnace - man they would only profit from him and be more satisfied with his performance if they would let him work in the mechanical department. It took them a few weeks to have the authorities persuaded over to their

side. My father got his wish granted. Soon, he enjoyed his work improving machines in the very backward shop. I, myself attended school and life was peaceful for a while time.

The school was about three kilometers walking distance. In the winter the temperature often surpassed minus thirty degrees centigrade. The snow there, was always dry and crisp and so was the air. It snowed frequently and heavily leaving the snow, layer upon layers. I don't remember if in the winter it ever thawed out or changed in temperature.

To shorten the way to school, I walked with my new schoolmates through the railroad-tracks. We could walk through the town's streets, but that would be in a round about circular way. The railroad tracks took us to school in a straight line. That way we also had the advantage of walking on cleared tracks cleared from the snow, so we could walk faster. The faster we walked the less cold we were and only our kerchiefs which covering our faces were topped with ice.

I quickly became acquainted with the Russian youth. They talked, I smiled, and that's how I started my first contact with them. I was a distraction to them... to me it was painfully difficult. To overcome the handicap, I tried to learn their language eagerly so as to be able to communicate with them. In the beginning I was embarrassed not being able to express myself properly, but luckily they were patient with me. All of them tried to help me understand and explained over and

over again, repeating every word, using their hands, faces and gestures , but not always successfully. As time passed on, I was less and less stressful .After sometime I realized that learning a language doesn't come over night . It took me some many weeks when I started successfully slowly to communicate with them partly verbally and\or using my body language.

At school , I was placed with the class of my peers according to my age. At first I was only placed as a listener, then when I increased my ability to comprehend I commenced to participate in the class curriculum, and only because of my difficulty in language, literature was to a certain degree omitted.

Although, my colleagues were sympathetic to me I still mingled with the seniors. I felt that I wasn't quite comfortable with my peers, in that somehow , I out grew them. It could have been that the influence of war which I had experienced in the past had an effect on me , and that had made me mature too quickly. I understood that I lost my childhood forever. I was too serious for my age. (The first outbreak of war had made an impact on me, so I grew up too fast.) For my senior friends I was kind of a kick for them; a curiosity. It was something new, something unusual, something that was worth while traing to satisfy their inquisitiveness and to learn about a Capitalistic country.. They liked me around them and I became their "pet ", and they sometime included me in their activities many times. They invited me to their tea parties, where we enjoyed tea and candy and fried bread in lard; (considered that as a rare

treat).I feltcontent with them

My language became perfected and I started to adapt to the environment and their way of life. But , life in the Soviet Union was very different from my native Poland. In the Soviet Union there was always a shortage of bread and other basic products; like milk, meat, sugar, soap, toothpaste and so forth. Generally speaking, everything... Other articles as well, such as clothing, furniture, bedding,electrical appliances and other necessities for living normally were not available or... so rare that only the privileged people belonging to the Communistic Party were able to acquire them...only when they were available in the country. In honor of a big national holiday, they had usually in the stores something special ,like dried salted fish, Galetki the tea biscuits,candy or sometimes we could obtain a piece of butter and much more often...spirit.

Therefore, when the stores did in fact carry sparse article on these rare occasions to supply the population (only one of these several mentioned) enormous lines would form.The lines were so big that they could have over a hundred people in them. To be at the near front of the crowd, people stood even through the night.(In the summertime, it was much easier than in the winters' snow or freeze.) Every grandmother offered their time , waiting in these lines,to take place of their working children.In the wintertime it was impossible to stay more than two hours in line alone themselves. Each Russian family member; either mother, granny, daughter,sister ,in-laws, or anybody able to stay for

hours in the line, organized themselves to take their turn in it, alternating, so they could be able to sustain the madness of the cold. The sacrifice of remaining in the waiting line so long, to be able to shop, was great. For a little butter or some candy they could stay in line for hours and many times the store couldn't even supply to everyone. Such thing as "a rain check" did not exist. It was such a hardship!

At school I noticed that at lunch time my peers could buy only one torpedo roll (saichku) (One only was limited to an individual). I would often see them splitting the roll in half and drench it under running cold water. When I asked them why they were doing that, they giggled explaining to me that this way it would be more filling this way...

Winters in Russia were very long. On Sundays, I either frequently went to the cinema where I saw only propaganda films or visited my friends. But during the summertime I had enjoyable memories. Frequently, in the early mornings when the sun scarcely started to seep through the pale sky, I would go with my friends to a big forest where we picked mushrooms.

The forests in Russia were beautiful, huge and mysterious, yet no one wanted to enter into them too far alone, for it was unsafe and risky. Wolves and other living creatures of the forest hid in its thick depth. But if a group went together and was prudent enough not to distance themselves too far from the bunch, it was less dangerous. At the edge of this gigantic forest

was a mostly picturesque glade, overgrown with tall grass which was covered with wild flowers all in different colors. The perfume coming from the forest blended in with the aroma of pine needles, moss and mushrooms, like the best potpourri in the world. But in the density and humidity the moss's smell took over. Covering the earth between the trees, the dark green moss looked like soft velvet interwoven with ferns and other plants, like an exclusive carpet. The upper tops of the trees were so thick that in the forest itself, it was sullen just like being under a dark canopy of greenery.

Entering into the forest, everyone searched for mushrooms. The girls, the moment they first discovered the mushrooms screamed with excitement, " Oh! I found them ! I found them!", and the echo repeated, " I found them ! I found them.!" " There are so many of them! So many! So many". Everyone picked the mushrooms . But I was unsuccessful. I couldn't distinguish them in the dark deep moss. My eyes wandered off everywhere ,attracted to all this splendor. I just couldn't concentrate. At first I couldn't see any mushrooms. Then, after a while my eyes became accustomed to this gloominess and suddenly by carefully observing the area I started to detect them springing up before my very eyes; the colorful, various mushroom heads , hiding in the deep moss. Once I uncovered one, it led to the others. To my surprise they mostly grew in bulks, crowding together close to the trees, others, close to the shrubs or simply between the moss . They popped up from nowhere as if touched with a magic wand. But not everyone of them were eatable. Many were poisonous.

My friends watched my harvest, gently laughed at me and threw out the harmful mushrooms from my basket and taught me how to distinguish the good ones from the poisonous ones. Living near the forest from their early childhood they were taught about the types of mushrooms that existed. . Their knowledge was amazing. Constantly hanging around the forest and supervised by elders picking berries and mushrooms, the girls were able to develop their skill. It was almost a ritual to every Russian family living near the forest to pick mushrooms ,then preserve them in barrows with salt for the winter season. The mushrooms in salt were marinated and they tasted deliciously.

At the end of our harvest, after having filled our baskets with a fragrant , variety of mushrooms, we relaxed , intoxicated with the beauty of nature. Tired from constantly bending over, we finally rested on the forest glade and basked under the sun which was still hot dazzling by it ,even though it was near sunset . The blue sky was seemed softened by the cotton white clouds and the sound of the birds made it seem like a paradise. It was so lovely to see the millions of white, yellow and blue shades of those perfumed wild flowers. All of it looked heavenly.

As we rested on this flowery , tall carpet of grass enjoying the wonders of nature we suddenly were invaded by flying birds and many crawling and swarming buzzing insects and beeng frequently attacked by bees or impetuous flies. We got ourselves involved in chatting away

merrily and compared everybody's harvest selection to one another. We watched the sun go down then with singing we walked home.

We had moved on along with our lives in this backward, foreign ,and oh so poor, and oh so little underdeveloped... but beautiful country.

My father managed to have a supplementary job and that helped us a lot, although modestly. It wasn't easy for my mother to have to go work in the shop, then also stay long hours in the long shopping lines, plus to take care of the home chores. She always complained, exhausted from waiting in those lines numerous hours that she was unable to catch up with all of her work.

There were many times that I would replace her in those lines, to ease her life, sacrificing my own leisure time. It was extremely difficult to get accustomed to the hardships of Russian life. By comparison , our life in Poland , was much better and more sophisticated. In my opinion both these countries were backwards, nevertheless Poland, culturally was on higher level.

As my mother voiced many complaints about her miserable life, so my father strongly opposed her from working in the seamstress shop. He simply wanted her to stay home.

One day my mother was so worn out that my father was determined to persuade her to have to end this situation. "Keep in mind" he said, "that I have two jobs that I work hard in, as well as the other side jobs at times . It's not the money I bring home that counts, its' the gratuities I receive from the job that matters. "Your effort is fruitless and it disturbs me to see you so

exhausted. Your effort is in vain and doesn't make any sense." he constantly repeated to her. "The little money that you do bring in from the seamstress shop is not adequate enough to buy anything on the black market. The stores seldom carry anything to buy anyways. It will be better if you just stay at home and take care of us " he insisted. He kept pressuring her incessantly to quit her job.

On Sundays, my father would repair machines at the bakery. This was his second job. There they called him, the "Magician", as up to then they hadn't had such a good trouble - shooter for the machines. They were extremely satisfied with his performance, to keep the machines from idling for too long of a period. He was recompensated as in addition to his pay in the form of fresh Barankies (,smaller than our bagels) and few kg. of flour which was more than a whole week's pay in itself. This flour could be exchanged on the black market for cash or for other necessities.

My mother finally had followed my father's advice, and one day didn't show up for work. A few days went by and everything appeared to be normal. We didn't think that my mother's quitting her job was a crime. But we were wrong! We weren't familiar with the Communistic rules and regulations behind the Iron Curtain! Alas! The consequence of my mother's quitting her job was, that she was arrested and sentenced to four months imprisonment just for not showing up to work. We couldn't do anything. My mother went to

jail.

For me, besides going to school and standing in food lines, in my mother's absence, my responsibilities had systematically changed. I became an instant housekeeper.

At home in Poland, I was never introduced to this activity.

Before the war the responsibility of cooking and cleaning belonged to our maid and I should be only school minded. In the time of war, the housekeeping was my mother's duty.

Now, it was left up to me. My father was always thinking of everything to make my life a little easier. He bought me a small portable electric stove, so as to not interfere with my neighbors who were at the communal kitchen. (I really don't know how my father could have managed it, but probably he had it as a compensation for his rendered services.) From where? I really don't know. Such items weren't available in stores. But, I learned to "don't ask".

We made a perfect place on a small not so perfect little bench for my portable electric stove and I started my culinary involvement.

Up to the age of fourteen I never even boiled water. Since I was a beginner starting with no experience whatsoever, I constantly overlooked my over-floating pots. Each time when my soup over boiled, the spills damaged the coil that caused them to burn out and break. When my father was around, he would always repair the damage and I would watch him as he did so with full admiration. But, one day he wasn't around. And it happened again. My soup boiled over. I was

devastated that my poor father will be coming home from work and that he would not have any supper. "

No", I said out loud," to myself, this to me is unbearable!" I looked at the broken spirals with desperation. " Oh,I know what to do, how simple it is to repair the damage! If my father could do it... I will be able to repair it too!" I saw him doing that so many times.

I boldly took two knives which weren't insulated ,(I didn't know the rules of the electricity then) and attached the two broken ends of the coil. Immediately, the two ends were soldered together and the current was again flowing through the red spiral... and through my arm, likewise .My face instantly swelled up. Luckily I instantaneously threw down my improper tools. I did pay for the aftermath of my ignorance and I did learn about electricity for the rest of my life.

Then, I had to also learn to be a laundress. I learned how to wash our linens and clothes by hands. In our town ,there wasn't any laundry facility and even if such could possibly exist, our income would never permit such a luxury.

One day, I hung our laundry out in the kitchen over night...The next morning, it was stolen...

Then I had to learn the art of shopping. This last one, believe me ,being the most difficult task. My hard working, preoccupied father one day told me to go to the market and buy meat and potatoes. " We haven't had any

meat for a long, long time." he sad " We will have a good supper thanks to my extra job. Go and buy a good piece of meat today. I myself, can't go to the market , that will be interfering with my work. " He gave me enough money to spend and... a kiss.

I was on my own. That was on a Sunday .

I had left home and walked to the market. The fresh layer of snow pleasantly noisily crackled under my feet,keeping to the rhythm of my march. I felt so grownup.

Dressed in warm felt boots,I was happy, full of energy, looking forward with pleasure to fulfill such an important task. I was very proud of my new responsibility. My first time food shopping!

On my way to the market, I bumped into my friends. They pleaded with me to join them on their cross country skis , but delighted with my mission I refused haughtily, having such a responsibility at hand and I went shopping .

When I arrived at the market,I was stunned by the market's image,it was deplorable. It didn't look like a market . There was only a small number of people wandering between eight huckster stands on a snowy rundown place. The meager stands exposed some scanty poor looking pieces of half frozen meat. In one of the big containers was a milk product , baked milk , a specialty of Russia, and in the other was regular milk. Also a few other individual hucksters, livid from the cold sold ,potatoes, onions ,carrots,beets and seeds.The hucksters weren't

professionals . They were mostly villagers selling their own produce, selling their own bread allotment. Yes! their own allotment. The food, if such was in the stores was only there for a few hours , then disappeared forever , but in the stores what they always did was expose and hung from windows artificially made beautiful imitations of links of sausages as well as ham .Bread and Swiss cheese were displayed in a showcase.These items were created from cardboard.

Bread too was difficult to get. The prices in the market place were highly inflated beyond everyone's budget of a working people.I looked at their merchandize passing by the stands , calculating what was best to buy. My reasoning questioned the escalated prices and I started to perspire.It was difficult for me to make such an important decision. I knew how hard my father was working only to keep our stomach modestly full.My conscience didn't permit me to spend all of his money for such a small piece of meat and a few potatoes.

"No, I can't spend such money for that ! " I revolted with myself, and returned home only with an onion net, as the onions were the cheapest.My father upon my arrival home received my outbreak of anger against the markets' injustice of prices with an outburst of laughter. He then went to the market himself. He was much more successful than his frugal daughter.

Being so very busy,the four months of mother's absenteeism passed by very quickly. When she finally returned , she told us

many stories about the jails. The jailed people were mostly the intellectuals of Russia who worked in the kitchen together with her. She learned an adage from them that says " If you haven't been here yet in the "Matushka turma" mother- prison, you surely will be someday and if you are ending your prison's term now , you will return someday...."

After the full four months, we were again reunited with my mother .Our lives improved to a certain degree. My mother after having finished " the punishment " was permitted to stay at home.My father, besides the two jobs, in his spare time ,repaired peoples' old sewing machines and other things too, that needed to be repaired. In spite of father's hard work, our living condition was still very constrained.My mother and I as always stood many hours in the long lines for sugar, bread, jam and if we were more fortunate ; butter(in small quantity) or... something else. However,my major occupation was always' school.

There were less and less products available in the stores and the lines grew more enormous.Every family member who still had a life and was able to go out from their homes, took turns staying in the lines.People who stood for a long time were annoyed by impudent swindlers, who were cutting in ahead of everyone pushing and paving their way in with theirs elbows. To make sure these cheaters did not get their way into the line improperly , the people themselves to control the situation devised a method of imprinting numbers(in numerical order) on the inside of their palms, using a pencil containing

China ink(non - erasable ink).As a consequence to this, there was frequently an exchange of extreme vulgarities ; very flourishing curses.Even small scuffles between women ensued. I always had portrayed a women as the softer and more self respectable of the human race , but this was not such a case in Russia. There , women were rigid and rude, hardened by daily hardship. Young women lacked femininity and especially the majority of the older ones.

The old women were dressed in very large dark petticoats without any underwear whatsoever and if they had an urge to urinate, they did so by standing anywhere, holding up their garment away, far from their legs, and letting go. Frequently, they would wet themselves underneath not even caring where they were....

Mingling with people especially in the crowds I learned their popular motto which they always reiterated with a special chuckle "If something is given to you -take it, if they beat you -run- away" As of that we learned from them to accept everything which was sold in the stores. It could have been a pair of shoes that didn't fit or a few yards of unsuitable percale for our needs, or even baby diapers... But, that was better than nothing.We could always trade it in for something we needed.

As in the honor of the upcoming national holidays they sold vodka. The result of that opportunity was that every street gutter, were full of drunkards ,instead of rain-water and that

is not an exaggeration. The countryman had not changed since the first world war. Their way of living was the same. They didn't know any better and generally lacked what they ate or wore. For them the hardship of life was so natural, yet for us it was a constant fight for a better day.

The Russians were very amicable toward us but they resented our way of living. Some would call us "Burjuye" The Capitalist with big irony. Very seldom, from them, would strive for better jobs or better future. They weren't ambitious. The refugees' mentality was altogether different. They were always thriving to do better, using every opportunity, and were more aggressive. The Russians observed us with a hidden jealousy.

At my father's working place the situation was the same. The machines and technique of the western world were far more updated in comparison with the Russian's. Their tools were primitive and the workers were messy. They were envious of my father's expertise and were offended for improving the work-technique which he introduced to them. Although my father wasn't an engineer, he had a natural talent of drawing prototypes of new projects, as he was full of ideas as to how to improve their efficiency. He drew numerous plans, mostly during the nights, when he could better concentrate. The benefit of his hard work only gave him applause at the foundry's meetings and at the end... his downfall was due to his two-faced so-called coworkers.

Although the difficulty of living spread wildly all over the country ,from one town to another in the Soviet Union ,life in Moscow was very different. Because this metropolitan city was the pride of the Soviet Union and under "the fist of the Iron Curtain" was not restricted to the foreigners, there was a better living condition mostly for the purpose of Soviet propaganda.The capital was supplied by a constant supply of goods which weren't able to be obtained in other towns. There in Moscow were stores with rare delicacies such as; caviar, oranges,lemons, coffee and even torte cakes.Many stores also fully carried; shoes, clothes, fabrics, cosmetics and other "luxury" products and other items. But... these articles could only be acquired with foreign currency(American dollars) or at a very high price.For people who learned to better master on the black market they frequently were able to exchange their valuables with visitors from other countries outside the Soviet Union (legally forbidden) or when they received American dollars sent in to them by their friends or relatives who lived in Capitalistic countries .

For my upcoming birthday, my father wanted to go shop in Moscow. To do so,he had to work extra hours and save that money as to be able to finally buy the few most necessary everyday needs as well as the birthday present for me.

He also wanted to investigate whether a possibility existed

to move to the Capital. To travel from one region to another a traveling permit was required from the administration. In the Soviet Union, it was forbidden to travel on your own. To avoid the procrastination of the bureaucracy which was typical in the Soviet Union, which means you never get anything done on time when you need it, my father decided to ignore this rule and didn't apply for this traveling permit. He chose to go to Moscow before the day of my birthday. He decided to take back roads leading into the city since he could discreetly avoid the regulation of "checking the permit for traveling" which was a rule. He went in a wagon drawn by a horse by the villages and fields with his acquaintance.

Returning from the trip to Moscow, my father came disappointed. He learned that it would be impossible to move to Moscow, since there were shortages of apartments. Furthermore, a permit was required to live there not granted to anyone.

For my birthday I received from my father a few yards of fabric for my aunt to make me a summer dress. Since my cousin was a jealous type of person she was envious of what I received for my birthday from my father. My father felt a past obligation to the family for help given to him in the past and offered to my cousin too the fabric. (She was given first choice to choose and of course, she always chose the best for herself having that priority to pick the material first.) In addition to this he bought each of us a pair of shoes in our correct size. What a joy it was for the both of us to have new shoes made from white canvas-pumps with brown heels! I was

fifteen years old. My first pumps! And...the experience having a new dress! That was my dream. What else could a fifteen year old girl dream? That was a magnanimous present I could ever receive. I remember how proudly my cousin and I wore our new dresses and shoes under scrutinize looks of our acquaints. Alas! We were not aware of peoples' envy!... During my

whole sojourn in Gus-Hrustalnyi, this was an out of the norm extravagant feat that my father traveled to Moscow to buy any gift for anyone since he could hardly afford the necessities required to sustain life itself. Ordinarily, Communistic rigor was even more difficult to endure for my family in comparison with the Russian people because they became for many, many years already accustomed to this type of life. Nevertheless, we

tried very hard to cope with it. If we had remained under the German's domain we would not even have had a chance to struggle to fight for our lives where as at least over here in Gus-Hrustalnyi, although we experienced inconveniences, we anyhow had some chance to exist.

We needed to communicate frequently with our next door neighbors who also came from Poland. Since news or information was impossible to obtain from anywhere and we didn't know what was going on; we have mutually shear information with our close neighbors received through the letters our families that we left behind us under German hands sent us and that kept us up dated and knowledgeable about the state of affairs but to a certain degree only. Each of us was eager to exchange any available information in connection to the more grave situation in Poland.

Every scrap, every ted-bit of news was dear and extremely important to us. The letters we would receive were censored letters coming from our family only from Warsaw and only for a while. The Germans would heavily block out paragraphs covered with thick ink lines. On the top of each envelope was a German insignia stamped saying; "Censored by Germany". It was clear that the peoples' writings were restricted. The Germans didn't want any information to leak out to other countries ,that is, about their horrid treatment of people.. Although, the letters reaching us was limited with information , we could sense their profound sadness within those letters in spite of the Germans' precaution of censoring and detected that they were experiencing much misery. Even ourselves who weren't in the best state of living , still wished that they were here with us. We were helpless. With knowledge that our loved ones who were left behind were those, less fortunate than we were, and knowing that their situation was even more worse than ours, we were thankful for what we had in the Soviet Union.

On June 22.1941 in the early morning, when everyone was still in deep sleep,we suddenly awoke from loud sirens which pierced the towns' tranquility just like unexpected thunder or an earthquake in a most pellucid day. Instantaneously to that,followed an announcement from a radio speaker informing us with gravity and troubled voice ,that ; " At 3:30 a.m. the Soviet Union took us by the Germans.This assault on the Soviet Union was taken by surprise. The Malta pact had been broken and we were at war". Following that broadcast, they shortly announced that "At 4:00 a.m. the German planes viciously bombarded Kiev and that we had suffered enormous losses. "

We listened to this broadcast of terror ,shivering and in astonishment. Again! Again the damned Germans; insatiable of human blood want to conquer the whole world!

The breaking of the Malta pact and the unexpected attack on the Soviet Union was frightening and paralyzed everyone's mind. The bombardment of Kiev was so painful that it was hard for the Russians to accept.

Everyone was petrified by the gloomy and scary news. This shocking news was so unexpected to us all. The people and the media were beyond all reason. The whole nation was in a state of hysteria.

We had not been at all introduced to outside politics,and the only one newspaper "Pravda"(which means "The truth" but nothing was further from the truth) , didn't inform us of any political

matter. In the Soviet Union no-one owned a radio receiver except for some unique party members. To build a radio themselves was impossible, as the material for it wasn't available. The only news was that which the government fed us with and was transmitted by the radio speakers installed in everyone's house, and public places.

Every succeeding day the news were bad. The over increasing numbers of killed Russian soldiers was devastating... Everyone of us walked around with despair. How could this happen? How could our government always preach the country's strength but not react swiftly? How could they not foresee German sneaky politics?! There were so many unanswerable questions.

Unfortunately, the Russian army was not prepared for this unexpected war. The Malta pact for them was an assurance of their country's peace and now Stalin was tricked by his allies. No-one could understand how Russia felt so bitterly betrayed so suddenly.

In fact of this "friendship" with Germany, the Soviet army was neglected, ill equipped, not ready to face German's attack. The Germans were in their best and had a good situation. They were in full power to continue their "Blitz Krieg" which previously so successfully swept Europe. They were dressed and fed not only by their own resources, but by the resources of the countries they conquered. They were richly furnished with the most sophisticated of army equipment. In addition to this, they had supplies of enormous backlogs of plundered army goods from

the defeated countries.

OUR DOWNFALL

About one week after the outbreak of war, my father was arrested by N. K .V. D. the secret Soviet police. He was falsely accused, thanks to anonymous denunciators, that his night time blueprint drawings were somehow connected with the Germans, and his private trip to Moscow was strictly a work of a spy. It had to be a fabricated alibi. This event had brought back horrible memories to me. It seemed as if I had never left Kalisz, and I was doomed to repeat once again, the horrifying endless nightmare.... A nightmare which followed me everywhere. A dream which will never stop as being extecate from one web , falling in to another ... We hoped that this unpleasant situation would be resolved in a matter of a day or two. How could they anyway accuse a Jew who just escaped from German atrocity?. We tried not to be alarmed in spite of the shock we experienced ,realizing that everyone's nerves were strained in connection to the German assault. Of course, it had to be an error!...

We had later found out that the denunciators, were the party men, the coworkers, who falsely accused him of sabotage. His fellow workers offered to the authorities such a ridiculous story just to hurt my father. Human jealousy can be very cruel!

But this matter did not get resolved in a matter of a day... They kept him for a certain amount of time in the town's jail, conducting him back and forth for hearings under pointed

rifles to the N.K.V.D. quarters. My mother would run to them like a mad woman, begging and trying to persuade them that the party men's accusation didn't have any grounds, that everything was utter nonsense. It was hopeless! After two weeks my father was sent to an even harsher prison; to Ivanovo basement cell. There, everyday and night, often as every two hours, he was awaked still half asleep, escorted to the top-floor, interrogated with beatings. My mother constantly visited N.K.V.D. office, but she was not permitted to visit my father because he was accused and treated as a German spy. What a divergence of judgement! Where was the logic! My father a spy?!... No, this had nothing to do with judgement nor logic. This was stupid ignorance. These simpletons, who couldn't cope with their prejudice, people who for their own satisfaction wanted to destroy, defame, annihilate, innocent beings because they were Jews. My father was a victim of outburst of blind begrudge, and no-one could help him in this matter. For them it was nothing to put someone into jail to rot. In the Soviet Union, no-one wanted to deal with the N.K.V.D. Lawyers were an integral part of the court and of course they were made a unit of the party.... They never worked in favor of the indicted. They were not loyal to the client but, to the party.

From the front, bad news arrived constantly .German offense was powerful. They had infiltrated deeper and deeper into Soviet territory. In August, Smolensk was leveled down from both side by their powerful attacks .There were heavy bombardments in that area, everyday inducing big devastation and destruction to the towns and villages.The Soviet army was losing their man power.Civilians and military people were being killed off like flies. At the Russian front, there was mass confusion just like there was also inside their own country. It was heart wrenching to listen to bad news of very heavy fatalities....and the enormous amounts of retreats.Smolensk changed hands every day, once Russian, once German.

Then..... Smolensk was captured by the Germans. That was a big blow to everyone. Women and men, even the older ones in the country, rushed volunteering to join the Soviet army.The country's disposition was low. Everyone was affected by such losses.Everyone's face expressed deep sorrow and sadness. The country was in trouble. People grieved their children, husbands , sons and daughters. Sorrow was infinite but, in spite of it, patriotism was strong and deep in everyone's soul, even more so now than ever before. (Russians were extremely patriotic all way calling their country "Mother Russia")

More and more bread started to vanish from the

store's shelves. It was less and less possible to buy other products. I was experiencing again and again the same situations that were so pathetic.

The Glass-Foundry's administration insisted to evict my mother and me from our dwelling. The only way to have a room was to be employed by the foundry as the building was designated only for Foundry workers.

We were in despair. My mother working for a private seamstress was paid greater sum of money then compared to working at the foundry. That was our only income. At that time I was on school-vacation. To lose our room would be macabre for us. We strongly opposed the eviction. The threat of having to live elsewhere in a slum apartment, horrified us. We wanted to retain this apartment at any price till the time my father returned. Due to that I decided, to interrupt my schooling. I stated to my mother, " Ma, now is summer vacation, maybe eventually they will let father go, and then I shall return to school. In the mean-time, I will work at the Foundry. This way we can keep our apartment. Anyway, I am, allowed to work only four hours as I am a youngster. It won't be so bad", I convinced my mother.

In our communal kitchen, the neighbors met every day around the stove, cooking their meals. My mother was friendly with everybody and like usual, she started up a conversation with one of our neighbors standing close by. She was a small, middle-aged, red haired woman, with a light complexion covered with millions of brown freckles. Her strong German accent prevailed

through her Russian speech. She was from German descent , living in the Soviet Union and worked as an engineer of agronomy for the Foundry's plantation.

The Foundry had a big field-land where she worked in. She was involved with organizing the vegetable garden, to supply fresh vegetables for the Foundry's kitchen.

After having talked with her for sometime about trivial matters my mother turned to her and asked her for advice, for a job suitable for me which I could apply for . My mother was very surprised when our neighbor suggested to her with excitement that the best place for me would be under her wing." This kid will enjoy working in fresh air! It will do her marvelously" she said to my mother. My mother, happy to hear such a comment repeated the conversation to me.

From the beginning I never liked that woman. When I greeted her hello, she didn't even give me a reply but to make my mother happy, I accepted the offer of this job . Anyway, what could go wrong working in fresh air? I always liked nature .

With great enthusiasm and pride that in such troubled time I could be of help to my mother, I went to work for four hours only. (due to my age). It seemed such a so small sacrifice for such an important matter. I thought of the great feeling I would have that we would be able to keep the apartment after all . Besides, working in a vegetable garden would not be such a bad thing. It might be lots of fun. I had never worked in a garden, but I always wanted to experience doing so. Working outside in fresh air sounded swell! My

first day at work I walked through the gate and gazed around the field. Under the absolute clear blue sky, the field encircled by the forest had a beautiful panorama of luscious green vegetables all diverse in shades neatly planted in large uniform rows. Its entire appearance was illuminated by the brightly glowing yellow sun, throwing the warm blinding golden rays everywhere. This made me feel good and happy. In the middle of this breath taking garden was a small shed with garden tools and a tiny house; my supervisor's office. Near it was a hand water pump, typical in villages and small towns. Parallel to the garden was a rail-road in operation but not very often used, that meandered in the wilderness and was almost covered by grass and small wild flowers. On the other side of the rails was a large forest. I had to walk to work and home, back and forth these few kilometers along this rail - road tracks.

I was very grateful to my supervisor for offering me such a "haven". The first day was difficult for me but I figured that this was only my first day and consequently I would get used to it. "It was only four hours" I justified it to myself. But, the next day it was the same. The dazzling sun's rays were in full strength and after 10:a.m. weeding under this condition was very uncomfortable as the sun heat started to hit me strongly. I bathed constantly under this burning sun. I was not allowed to rest in the shade, even for a short time. In addition to this, I wasn't even allowed to have a drink of water. "Don't forget, that you are only here

for four hours, so going back and forth is consuming time. I want to have the job done!" She insisted. " I can hire someone else!" my supervisor told me with a harsh tone. I was intimidated. This job was important to me. So, I overlooked the way she exerted her aggression. As a response to this I promised her with a smile that tomorrow I would do better .

Everyday, I tried to satisfy my supervisor working laboriously, and without any protection against the hot sun. It was unbearable. With- out breaks , unable to leave my work area for a few minutes; my skin burned, like a red cooked lobster. It then peeled. On Sunday (there, everyone had one working day off a week.) I slowly recuperated from the burns. I continued going to work in the plantation. Weeding, apart from the heat, wasn't so bad, but only monotonous and boring. The more pleasant of jobs for me, was to intrench the earth with a hoe around the cauliflowers ,cabbage and potatoes. That was less boring. Allowed me to stand, I stretched at times to relive the pressure off my back and I would change my position to " evenly fry" under the constant burning sun.

Worst of all was the watering problem. Like everything else in the Soviet Union it was primitive in every single way. This big area needed to be watered well, but the only facility was a single main hand -pump. To supply the necessary water for this plantation we had use hand watering cans. The water was fetched from this solitary small pump, built in the middle of this enormous place. I carried the water with big pails and would then pour the water into the watering cans that I watered

the rows of vegetables .The second day of work, my supervisor placed upon my shoulders a wooden yoke and required that I transport water in only that way. "But, I never did it that way in my whole life!" I said in horror , trying to get away from this frightful duty unfit for me."Never mind, you will learn" she replied angrily. The wooden frame of the yoke had a hollow space, enough room for my shoulders to place within or fit.From both ends were attached big heavy metal pails.Its capacity was around twenty to twenty -five liters each . To pick them up and bring them over onto your shoulders would require strength and to even walk with them, full of water was another matter.For an unexperienced person it was impossible. My knees bucked under the pressure of the weights. The two buckets were so heavy that under this load I felt as if my legs at any moment would give in , as if they were made of rubber.At any minute I thought that I would fall, together with the two pails .Practicing for sometime, I slowly started to control them ,learning how to stand and then, how to walk with this unsteady weight. The whole trick was to balance the two opposite buckets full of water and simultaneously control my step.The moment that I took a wrong step somehow I would lose my equilibrium' and lose control.The containers of water danced in opposite directions . Uncontrollably, they would bounce like a pendulum splashing water ,here and there. For a person acquainted with such the coordination of handling such pails it worked just like a very sensitive scale.

Despite the fact that I finally acquired my balance , this

load was unbearable for my small body. I didn't quite fill them up to the top to be able to withstand their heaviness, but my "employer" caught me and was furious with me. She firmly demanded me to fill them up all the way, to the rim reasoning, "to avoid losing time". In tears, I tried to explain that this was too heavy for me and that my back was hurting. But she insisted, unmoved in her demands and started using abusive words which were to me very painful, knowing that I was doing my best. She would constantly cram the different jobs scheduling one after the other as to not lose any minute of my precious time, as if I was the most important expert in this field. She watched me like a watch dog. Her flagrant attitude didn't please me at all. I started to be suspicious. I realized that I was being verbally abused. Her behavior grew more mischievous everyday. Worst of all was that the two of us, were surrounded only by nature, without any witness. I didn't have anybody to turn to for help and in essence who would believe a kid's complaint against an important engineer? I also didn't want to stir anything up with her, since my father was in jail and that was to my disadvantage. But, I felt that I was a victim of her inexplicable intolerance and unprovoked fury. I certainly didn't merit such inhumane treatment. Finally, this place was not a working place but a labor camp. I felt like a slave. Apart from the fact that I didn't tell my mother anything to not make her feel miserable, I was still making an effort to cooperate with my boss. But it was useless... Her eyes constantly followed me. She never smiled and her looks were always full of hate.

My situation became desperate. To me the most important thing was to hold onto the apartment. I was waiting for my father with impatience. "He must comeback! He will prove to them and to everyone that he is innocent!" I repeated it to myself every moment I had to myself ,and every time I would shed my wrenching tears. But the abusive treatment and my aching back started to get more and more unbearable and I soon had to give up... I broke down and finally told my mother about it. She insisted that I change my place of work. I wrote a petition to the foundry's administration and soon after I was transferred from the "Garden of Eden" to the Foundry. My suffering ended. My work was satisfying and I was relieved from my despotic boss.

My mother able to continue working for a private dressmaker and I, working at the foundry were able to preserve our apartment. We were able to modestly survive.

School already began, but I couldn't return to it in that my father had not yet been released. One day one of my teachers seeing my mother on the street walked up to her and stopped my mother one day and begged her to make me comeback. She was very impressed with my progress. It was so tempting but...

My mother also traveled lots of times to Ivanovo prison. My father still was there without a verdict. He was in solitary confinement and frequently beaten up during interrogation.

More and more did grim information spread that Russians failed at the front and that German atrocity was reaching us. They burned villages and towns to the ground , killing and

hanging innocent people. We learned that the Jews were forced by Germans to dig their own ditches and then they were shot like animals and buried in them by their own people. This information was leaked through from the escapees. German strategy concentrated on directing their thrust in a few areas and one of them was Moscow. Besides that, Moscow was the capital of the Soviet Union. It was also valuable to the Germans in as Moscow was an important armament center, and a focal point leading to Siberia. It was in October when Moscow was attacked from the west and north and finally was almost completely encircled. The Red Army was near its end. They lost man power and weaponry which were astronomical. Moscow seemed about to fall into German hands. We were frightened. My mother and her two sisters were panicking. Panic was everywhere. The people from Poland with whom we entered into the Soviet Russia, started to realize that danger was near. Everywhere anxiety was gigantic. The Germans were close to our town. If Moscow is captured by the Germans they could capture our town in a matter of a few hours and we knew that this would be the end of us....

The Germans were very successful in their offense and the battles were ferocious. The Red Army was stoic, fighting to its last breath. For them Moscow was precious. Apart their patriotic feelings, they also instilled the feeling of revenge for the Germans brutality.

The evacuation process from our town had already been initiated. They started shipping the more important machinery southward and some other things as well with which I wasn't

familiar with.

The population from our town and its vicinity was allowed to travel without permits. It was not only to travel freely but free. The situation was grave. The rumors were pitiful.

They told us that my father was condemned without a trial, sentenced to ten years in prison for ESPIONAGE.

..... German troops encircled Moscow - like a ring and every day it was tighter. Moscow trembled. Our town was in a fever. Anxiety, confusion, consternation and horror possessed every one. Freight trains were to everyone's disposition. Everyone who wished to evacuate was welcomed. Every train was practically directed to Tashkent. Tashkent was our direction.

Once again we packed our belongings but this time from Gus Hrustalnyi.

Traveling to Ivanovo and again trying to visit my father, was out of the question. The military activity didn't allow us to go there, because the front was very near. We had to let my father's case go. Now we had to do what everyone was doing. Everyone advised us, for our own safety not to stay any longer in this town, constantly recommending us; " You have to leave this town in case the Germans overtake it .They will be here any day. " It was obvious that the Germans' invasion was almost for certain. Fighting with our mixed emotions, we knew that everyone was right. There was no way to contact my father. Convinced by all, that the best thing for us to do would be to stay faraway from the invasion, we , my mother and her sister's families and myself without my father, decided to flee from this town.

It was the end of the year nineteen hundred forty- one, as we left Gus-Hrustalnyi. The winter was already creeping up. We traveled in freight wagons with lots of people. Those few families who had come together with us from Poland also joined us in the evacuation.

And again, we lost our nest! Again ,we were on trains in the freight wagons , surrounded with strangers! Again, we were exposed to an unknown destiny. It seemed that "vagabonding" was

a part of life for us.

On our way to Tashkent, my cousin's and my own imaginations ran wildly, fantasizing a life full of enchantment. This voyage sounded very exiting for the two of us. On the basis of the book; "Tashkent- the bread basket" it was promising. Both our expectations in every aspect and our beliefs were unrealistic. The elders, listening into our conversations just shook their heads and with their sweep of hand they said, criticizing "The kids are so ignorant, they don't know what they're talking about". " We are going to an exciting place! We will eat watermelon to our heart's content! Oh! The exotic life ! We will eat exotic fruits! Insisted my cousin said, my dearwe will have lots of bread and lots of fun!" my older cousin declared with great excitement, sitting in the train by my side .

We traveled many days and nights. We passed Magnitogorsk . We lost count of the days we traveled as well as the places. We hung around the vast uncultivated lands where the freight train tracks had ended many times waiting a day or a night, or sometimes more than for twenty four hours, for a "friendly " locomotive. To us, it didn't matter which direction we were headed in as long as we were faraway from the Germans. Unwashed and hungry we knew that this was better than being in German hands. But we were at the mercy of fate. We were unimportant people .No one was interested in us. For us it was only ;to wait. When it was possible , they snatched our wagon. We were only unimportant cargo. Sometimes we would stay where we were , detached from the rest of the train

resting for a few days with no- where to go or to buy food. Our locomotive would disappear with other cargo.... the more important cargo...Sometimes, our wagon could be a part of an enormous train which had to be pushed by a few other locomotives, not necessarily going in the direction that we were headed....

Looking out from the moving train (although the train was always running slow) the panorama of the view flashing had changed as we left Russian territory. We could see, less and less Russian towns or villages . Then everything started thinning out. Here and there trees and settlements were rare. Then they disappeared from our view completely. So, did the snow disappear and finally we were surrounded by flats of brown grass. Very seldom could we see a pathetic dwarfish tree and again there was the monotony of steppes without end. It was steppe , steppe and steppe. The sky and the earth was so dull there wasn't anything to look at. When the train did speed it was as if the view of the unending panorama spinned through our wagon's half- opened door , and sometimes it felt like every view was the one picture postcard sliding constantly through a projector. This continued till we entered Kazakhstan. There, I could see at times large round huts made of straw. They were always surrounded by goats, small horses, donkeys, poultry, people and lots of dogs. The Kazaks' people looked vibrant with their slightly slanted, narrow eyes and colored skin. Then we passed Aral-sea and we went through Kyzyl-Kum Desert. "How can I forget a desert"! Again I passed by the dull flat surface uncultivated territory burnt by the sun with out trees and any

living beings. It was only a monotonous, blue flat sky and uninteresting brown and apathetic surface .

After many days, losing count, we began to ignore the desert's existence. We didn't even want to take a peek at it . We finally arrived at Tashkent (Uzbekistan).

At the time of war , Tashkent was the center receiving the most amount of evacuated people. When we arrived we were amazed at what we saw. A colossal crowd of people manoeuvred their way into the platform of the station. Roars, shrills, children's loud cries, were mixed in with chicken or geese cackles . Chicken and geese were frightened by the loud crowd, trying to escape from their oppressors. They were squashed underneath the arms of hucksters who held them and who rushed out from the station. Someone was selling, announcing loudly his merchandise. His voice faded into that noisy crowd . The station was so mobbed with arrivals, , who were mostly runaways from occupied or threatened places from the war , that it was necessary to force our way through, cutting into the chaotic mob. Women with their children in the arms, men with their hands full of baggages, everyone was rushing, pushing in one direction to the center's information booth. We followed everyone.

People from the information booth directed us to the evacuation center . Going out from the station building and looking back at it I lost my excitement completely. My spirit was broken. The station looked filthy inside and unimpressive. Outside was the same. It was a light bluish-green undefined color, two-story wooden building . This was Tashkent station. It didn't fascinate

me at all. I was expecting something more exotic. Somehow, I was disappointed with its appearance. My grand illusion extinguished.

There were large one humped, ugly camels walking alongon streets which were filthy, paved with rocks, jutting out, that made it bumpy ,giving you the impression that it was the camels who were the most important objects in this ill - forsaken world. These camels loaded up with bread on them were stacked flat. The rider who sat on the hump was behind the huge and round bread that looked like pancakes. The camels walked about with such pride in themselves as if they knew that they were the only means of transportation. That fascinated me the most. I only saw camels in zoos, but never... with one hump. The Middle Eastern bread big and round like large wheels also attracted my curiosity. I never had a chance to taste it, during my sojourn to the in Middle East.

People in their Eastern clothes looked shabby and dirty , contrary to my expectation ; not at all, as they were presented in the movies. Everything had looked filthy. We were very depressed. We even had to stop talking to one another, only thinking as to when and where we could have a bath. Our trip deprived us of any possibility of hygiene.

At first , at the center, , we had been directed to a bathhouse as we were all inflicted with lice. We slept in the same garment we wore all this time, only washing our hands and faces with kipiatak. The evacuation center was aware of the

consequence of the peoples' long traveling, afraid of the already scattered , breaking up epidemic of typhoid.

The bathhouses to where we were sent ,were equipped with enormous caldrons ,in which they used the highest degree of temperature to kill the lice within the infected garments.

While they took care of our clothes we had a good bath.

The communal bathhouses were like steam water bathing; very common in the whole country. The big place with cemented floors , intersected channels for the escape of the water utilized . The place was furnished with long rows of low wooden tables. Individual big metal buckets were placed on every table. The water for the wash was fetched by the bathers with their buckets, from the big wall faucets. Standing naked side by side everyone ,we washed ourselves from this bucket with this steamy hot water, pouring it, and splashing it on ourselves, then spilling the rest of the water on our bodies and fetching the water again till our heart's content. Many beat their flesh with a bunch of twigs for good circulation..This type of bathhouses were all over the country. To my knowledge few knew about bathtubs That pleasure was privy; usage for the Party People. After our wash ,we had dressed into our unwashed but disinfected articles as we didn't have any more clean ones..Immediately after our baths we were sent to get a passenger train to go to the village near Tashkent. I don't remember the name of this village, maybe as the name was in Arabic, difficult for me to remember, or simply it is blocked

from my mind. We walked with a guide three kilometers from the train to the village.

The Usbekien village was very unlike Europeans ones. Their squished looking rectangular shape one room houses with flat roofs ,at first glance , resembled toy houses made by children playing with play - dough . The houses were built of unbaked, dried mud with small secretive entrances, having hidden orchard amidst mud walls. Every house was watched by a swarm of dogs..The architecture was more than that of simplicity. They called it "kibitka" . Later I had the opportunity to visit a deserted house to satisfy my own curiosity . But we weren't welcomed to houses which were inhabited .

(Once I tried to contact a Usbekien family,instead I was badly bitten by a dog).

The walls inside the abandoned house was also finished with mud .In the middle in this single room was a opening a few inches wide on the dry mud floor which was a hearth place , surrounded by a few foot warmer already molded into shape togetherwith mud together onto the floor. .Even in Usbekistan heat it was necessary as in January it wasn't warm at all.

This winter of 1942 was unusually cold in Usbekistan.. The ground was sometimes slightly frozen. We were placed also with a few other families in a one room house , a wooden house,unique in this village,which probably served as a country office in the past. This only room which was big and dilapidated had apparently served as a sheriff's house. It also had a kitchen

stove.I wondered why? Office desks if ever there was such , were removed before our arrival.Or... maybe they never even existed there at all.The floor and walls were shabby ,made from unfinished raw wood, grayed by time and filth.A number of other families laid directly on the dirty floor beside us and shared it with us.That was our "sanctuary". This house was our home.We couldn't oppose placement that was given to us. We did not have a choice.The condition was more than deplorable.In the Soviet Union no- one could oppose, but to obey and in particular at the time of a continuing war....

Without information whatsoever(no newspaper ,even Pravda), not knowing what was happening in the theater of war, we lost complete contact with the outside world life.The news didn't reach this detached village.We were only disposed garbage in the proper field ; organic decay.

The very next day we were sent to work. Our work was to pick the cotton from the neglected cotton fields sprinkled with snow.

Russians were never good organizers ,especially in the time of war. Due to the activity of war, there was a shortage of workers for their fields . These fields were left untouched since workers had to join the military so, up to this time no one picked the cotton, leaving these fields to rot. It was only by chance that our group of people came far as this village and they putting us in a spot to," willingly" offer to help only to receive temporary shelter.

It was winter time during our stay in this Uzbekistanien village. The thin layer of snow which previously fell during the night, melted at daytime as the sun was warm, and made deep mud causing roads not to be solid. It was very uncomfortable to walk on these unpaved roads, sticking, and sinking into the mud while wearing our only pair of shoes. Each of us had a burlap bag attached at front on the neck then strapped around the waist for picking cotton. The cotton we collected was unloaded at the cotton center, which was also a far walking distance. Each time we had to unload it, we had to walk the neglected road again and again only to be stuck in this gooey mud, trying to pull our legs out of it and always with difficulty.

At the center we piled our cotton up under a roof that was supported by wooden pillars where Uzbekien women sat comfortably. Sitting by the big pails, these women pulled the seeds by hands from the raw pieces of cotton, while chatting amongst themselves. They were dressed in their national costumes in silk of various colors . . . (The silk was accessible to them since the Uzbekians cultivated silk worms for the production of pure silk). The women's faces were hidden by the traditional cover made of horsehair. They were unfriendly toward us, completely ignoring our presence as if we did not exist.

We weren't paid for our work. For survival, we daily received a small amount of flour, which was dark, dirty grayish, matching the color of our walls and floor. I never saw such flour! I never even knew that such flour did exist! Maybe it was only a product for paste? It

was impossible to make something edible from it. Since we couldn't get any additional ingredients, water was the only source available to mix into it. That was the only help, that we could get from this village. But, hunger proved that anything was possible. On the stoves'-surface, everyone learned the art of making "the pancake", quickly baking it from both sides with a special developed skill. It had to be turned very quickly on both sides since over baking usually meant falling apart. If you ask me how they tasted? Well, I would say, that in the time of hunger one doesn't care of its taste, everything is good as long as one could chew and swallow it to calm the stomach from pain. Anyhow, our stomachs were probably extremely immune to everything by now...

Worst of all, was that we again were unable to keep clean as there wasn't any sanitary condition available. The extra time we had, we worked on our clothing, cleaning them from the lice and in the mornings shook them into the snow (if there was a snowfall). Shame was gone, so was human dignity, as everyone was not omitted from this infestation. Our thorough cleansing didn't help us for long since we couldn't get rid of these pests. The floor was the "liaison" between the crawling insects and everyone in the room. We were afraid of Typhoid. There weren't even outhouses. People, from our town with whom we came, were the first victims of typhoid. They had been taken away to a hospital and there they died. The hospitals (in town) were full of people struck by the epidemic, dying every minute.

From the outside there wasn't any news. What's going to happen to us? We can't stay in this place and condemn ourselves to death! Those people which were removed from our lodging; mostly everyone of them had died.

Our village sheriff came to see us every day. He was a robust young man, speaking Russian perfectly. He looked just like a well painted picture with almond shaped eyes with a light brown face wearing his hat trimmed with fur. (The well to do men wore fur hats in the winter, but in the summertime everyone wore skullcaps) He looked very asiatic. He would usually make an offer to my mother asking her to trade me in for a few burlap bags of rice." But you are already married!" my mother would explode with laughter. "I don't believe in polygamy!"

"Our old custom is to have many wives as much we can afford" he told her. "But I promise you, she will be the only one!" he said. "My parents married me without any sentiments. They bought me a wife. They still believe in the old custom. I, myself am a Communist and I also don't believe in that custom either."

I walked with my mother many times to the bazaar, looking with curiosity at Usbekian husbands dressed up in their striped caftans and their skullcaps surrounded with at least three or more wives. The women in their amazingly harmonious conduct were well dressed in their national costumes; in long colorful, silk dresses. That was foreign too! We observed them discreetly, admiring the amicable relationship and self respect amongst

themselves. There wasn't any jealousy between them, on the contrary. They were chatting between themselves, choosing the best color suitable for each other one or even buying the same articles. The bazaar's stands were full of watermelons and other fruits and there were vegetables (This time as I reflect on my cousin's words, she was right about the exotic display) but we couldn't afford any of this anyhow...

Our situation became more and more grave. We had to do something! The cause of the filth, hunger, epidemic and in addition to the sheriff's unpleasant proposal to my mother which scared us, made us determined to leave the village on our own.

IN THE DIRECTION TO CHINA

Before we left the village we had a family consultation as to where we should go. We decided that the only solution we had to survive, we was to cross the Soviet's border maybe... into China .

To travel about wasn't a problem anymore. Due to the turmoil of war we had a free hand to get by in every way, even inside the country without a permit and ... freely. The troubled government didn't give a dam about anyone. In such chaos the "government" becomes lenient and overlooks and ceases to interfere with people's private lives. Of course we already knew that at time of peace this sort of traveling without a permit was forbidden.

We left the village simply telling the sheriff that we were leaving his village, looking for my father. He wasn't very happy ,however he couldn't stop us. At the day of our departure our friendly sheriff insisted to accompany us to the train station. " This is my obligation " he told us. As he, rode on his horse,,my whole family walked to the nearby station. The horse with his rider trotted behind me like a shadow making me feel uncomfortable and he would keep pace along side of me incessantly urging me to climb on with him onto his horse. I was scared and horrified . I learned from books and films that the Arabs are known to kidnap women. I had walked the three kilometers ignoring his constant annoyance and imagined my most dreadful fate. My insecurities left me only when I sat inside the

train wagon happily waving at him goodbye. The only thing I concentrated on was China.

We are going to China! It is so exciting! China was a dream of mine! Fantasizing this future adventure I allowed myself to invent scenes inside my head going overboard with my wildest of imaginations. My vision about this oriental country was draped with illusions. These images didn't leave me till we arrived at Alma-Ata.

At Alma-Ata we waited for a train which would take us to Frunza(Kirgiz). Since we had a long period of wait for the train's arrival we had lots of time to kill , my mother and I decided to take a walk to see the town's center. It was very cold in Alma-Ata.

The towns' streets were almost deserted in the frosty early morning hours. We were very, very hungry. On our way there from time to time a delicate smell from a nearby bakery would carry into the air , reaching our nostrils, tickling ,irritating ,tormenting us, and magnified our desire for food, aggravating our already existing stomach pain. "Ma" I sad " when the war will be over and our exodus will end with the return back to our home to live a normal life, my greatest wish is to have so much bread on the table that after satisfying our hunger, there it will still be a piece of it left for tomorrow.I promise you , that I will never care anymore for any desserts, since a piece of bread especially when fresh and warm is best of all." My mother responded only with a faint smile. It was so cold that my muscles started to stiffen up.

Suddenly someone grabbed me by my arm and pushed me into a small store . I noticed that the shelves were bare.(In Soviet Union the stores were empty) All around the iron -wood- stove which was situated in the middle of the store, red from the excessive heat , looking as if about to explode,was surrounded with a few people, sitting , warming up their feet and chatting amongst each other.Without any explanation this very man who grabbed me ran quickly out of the store, and in matter of an instant he brought back with him a big handful of snow and started to rub my nose vigorously with it.I was in shock and disoriented as well . I felt like a mummy, letting him do this to me trying to , figure out why he was acting so odd. Strange things were happening to me! I wasn't able to stop this performed attack to my face.I couldn't even scream." What is happening?!" I thought for a moment that I am in a mad house, but then came the explanation; As I walked with my mother on the street,a man passed us by and saw that my nose had turned white with frost bite.The man felt sorry for me and took action.My mother realizing what could have happen , heartily as she could, thanked him a million times . After this snow massage, my nose got hot and red like a tomato. The nose was saved! Glad of this happy result, we enjoyed the hospitality of these people within the store for a while and drank warm tea with them which they had shared with us.

We warmed up at the stove while we consumed the hot tea which made us feel vigorous and reinforced strength.Marching quickly back towards the station I was delighted that I still

had possession of my nose. We approached the train station. We joined our family and we all boarded the train in a very puny station, Fergana. We were close to the Chinese border. It wasn't as easy as we planned it to be. We weren't adequately prepared for this enterprise. Lack of information paralyzed us. On one hand, our idea was only absurd and outrageous, yet on the other hand there wasn't another solution but to go into it blindly. Or even yet, ...to have the option to stay in the village, and vanish from Typhoid. We were desperate walking on the streets, constantly looking for a connection, but how? If you don't know where to go or who to trust ... In this strange place we couldn't turn to anyone. This was our big dilemma which completely tarnished our prospective plans. Thinking to ourselves; could you confide in anyone and say that you want to escape from the Soviet Union while that someone you confide in could be a party member and could turn you in? Of course not!! That would be disastrous. Desperate, not knowing what to do, we returned to the station knowing only that we were near Mt. Communism and did our best trying unsuccessfully. That was the end of my dream to go to China. We still held on for luck to Andizhan, then Dzhalal _ Abad and Namangan. Back and forth we constantly looked for information that we could cling onto or to be able to contact someone who would be able to guide us. After all these attempts we went back to the bigger and more populated town Alma Alta with no results whatsoever. Our traveling was chaotic. We took to travel in any direction. But

what could we have accomplished in this " unfathomable abyss"?Thrown into this kind of predicament and uncertainty we could achieve nothing more. Our effort was fruitless; wasted. We were lost without any hope .

Desperate , exhausted and resigned, constantly , during our travel we stopped in various many stations and took every opportunity to disinfect ourselves.After doing so we boarded the train again.Crossing the frontier to China was out of the question. My dream of ecstasy had been killed.

The news from the front finally reached us. We were excited that the news was more favorable.The Germans had been pushed back from the outskirts of Moscow and the Red Army was holding its own strongly. That was to us a spark of hope , which ignited our change of plans and we started our journey back towards Moscow , hoping that somehow we will be able return to Gus-Hrustalny.

On our way back going in the direction of Moscow ,during our chaotic travel my aunts with their last savings bought a considerable amount of tobacco(makhorka).At that time tobacco, needles and razor-blades were an bigger investment. On the black market it was more valuable than money.For a glass of tobacco people could obtain many things. This was even more reliable than cash. Men would pay a lot for this smoking hobby,which was in demand due to its shortage or simply because it was impossible to get hold of. Anything could be bought with makhorka. As a matter of fact anyone who had tobacco could exchange it for a piece of bread and for whatever else there was available. My mother and I didn't have such a treasure so we depended on the rest of the family.

I would frequently have unpleasant arguments with my " dear cousin" who constantly tried to show off her superiority to me. She was four years older and being the families' favorite , she tried to dominate me without limit. For many years I accepted her behavior as I was told to be kind to her since she was fatherless. But recently , I too lost my father (maybe forever), I couldn't tolerate her anymore and refused to submit to her.In the back of my mind, I knew that this act of "superiority" of hers was only because we had no other choice but to depend on her mother and aunt. For the most part, to eliminate most arguments, I used diplomacy . Or simply for the sake of peace of mind I would surrender ,giving in to her, to make my mother happy. But , by the time our train approached Turkestan

, I was much too hurt and my dignity had been already ruffled. Feeling uncomfortable because of our financial dependency on the rest of her family, I understood my mother's behavior and I felt miserable to be upon the mercy of others. My mother was helpless and unable to think for herself. She was completely lost. It came to a point that I couldn't take it anymore. My nerves were stretched to the breaking point. It just so happened one day that in the middle of one of my cousin's hot arguments, the train stopped and two of my aunts stepped out, down into the crowd of peddlers and looked about, for a possibility to exchange the makhorka for bread. At that particular time the affront made by my cousin was unbearable. I couldn't stand her type of humor. Noticing that she was completely losing her temper I imagined myself not giving up this time. I turned to my mother, grabbed my suitcase firmly and declared, that I would not be a victim of the bad seed and if my mother wants to stay with the rest of the family she can do so; "But, as for me I am leaving!" I told her with loud angry voice. After having said so, I jumped out from our wagon and rushed away very far, looking for the very last wagon on this long extended train, to jump into.

My mother was in dismay, looking at me with an open mouth and with wide opened eyes full of uncertainty. "Wait! Wait for me" she called after me, but my mind was made up. I was determinate to break away from my "dear family". Frightened as she was, that she could lose me, she sensed that I was determined this time to do something drastic. She followed me and walked out off the

wagon.I started to run and she followed me. When we reached the end of the train, I plunged myself into the last wagon. She could only reach the first wagon's step and the locomotive whizzed by steaming and spraying drops of water.

The train started to move.Feeling as a warrior, I felt good about myself. At last I was liberated from my nasty, persecuting cousin for the rest of my life.

Sitting with me in the empty compartment, mother started shedding abundant tears. " Oh dear! Now we will starve to death! Who will help us?.We haven't anything and you are so hungary ". She was lamenting out loud. "I rather die" I told her , " to be always degraded ,and anyway the amount of help we received from them was so little that in fact it really doesn't make a difference to me. We are starve constantly." I barked out at her like a mad dog, vexed at her complaints." You are scared of hunger?" I added in a mocking tone. " Nothing is new to us ! If we should die , we will die!" Then I comfortably seated myself into the corner of the pullman wagon's bench,stretching my body out widely onto it, attempting to go to sleep. Weak, I had fallen asleep almost immediately under the rumbling sound of the train-wheels.

We traveled for some time.

I was furious at the whole world. Angry and irritated I didn't even have the desire to go into a conversation with my mother, being that the topic would be the same. In essence, we hadn't eaten up to now for a few days. I was feeling very debilitated. Looking at my mother I could see that she was also very

emaciated. My hunger pain left me completely and I only wanted to sleep. The train's movement rhythmically irritated me like annoying lullaby, but in a short time we both again were rocked to sleep. No-one came to bother us so we could sleep as much as we desired.

We traveled many hours. Because we slept, I lost track of time. Nothing was important to me. I only cared that the train was carrying us closer to Moscow. Our only desire was to reach Gus- Hrustalnyi and to maybe receive some news about my father hoping to contact him. The train constantly stopped at many small stations. People got in and got out. Our compartment still was occupied only by us as we were at the end of the long train. The last wagon never was boarded with passengers since everyone looked for compartments exiting closest to the station's entrance. For me it was convenient. I had peace to sleep as long as I wanted. I was exhausted and drained from constant hunger. It was silent, and blissful, and I wished never to be awakened... Then someone opened energetic our compartment door. Automatically, without having any curiosity I opened up my eyes only for a moment to look the intruder. It was a young Russian soldier who came in.

"Is there anyone else occupying this compartment other than you?" he asked happily with a big smile. "NO! can't you see?" I replied irritated. Again I closed my eyes. He shook his head and sat across from me still smiling. The long legged soldier with a pleasantly smiling face didn't disturb me at all and I even didn't care that I was rude. He

started chatting with me . I ignored him. My eyes were heavy ,full of sleep. I didn't have a desire to enter into a conversation. I wanted everyone to leave me alone,so that I could sleep... and nothing else. At that point, I didn't care what and who was in this compartment.My body became lethargic. Embarrassed by my behavior, my mother entered into a conventional conversation with him just for the sake of being polite. He looked at me constantly with curiosity . Many times puzzled ,he glanced in my direction , trying to distract me and tried to include me into the conversation but ,I only answered him having my eyes closed. Suddenly, he turned to my mother and asked almost angrily " What is the matter with her? Is she sick? Is there something wrong with her.?" " What can you expect from her after so many days of hunger, particularly the last three days of complete starvation " my mother answered him almost in tears. For a short time he looked at us mute and bewildered ,then quickly jumped up on his long legs reaching into his Army bag,and rapidly pulling out of it a gigantic untouched, round loaf of bread. I looked at it ,thinking; " Oh, my God is this a real loaf of bread! Or?... This is only Fata-Morgana (mirage). Am I ill? " saying this to myself. "Here! Take it!" He insisted pushing the bread into my mother's arms. "But, you?" My mother said with an uncertain sound, staring at him. "Listen! Be reasonable! In a few minutes I am leaving. The next stop will be my home village.I'm on a furlough and I am going home. I was wounded and I stayed in the hospital. I have now recuperated and I am going home. I'm on leave for two

weeks. Take it ! I know that in the village there will be a big party to celebrate my arrival.. Don't you understand!! I am happy to be alive! My family are farmers, they managed to have food. I realize that they will not miss this loaf of bread." He almost shoved into my stupefied mothers' arms. Swept with shock and emotion we couldn't properly express our gratitude. These words stuck in her larynx. At that moment the train stopped and our young soldier jumped from the train steps, waiving at us from the outside with a happy bright smile. As the train started to move, he vanished from view. He disappeared from our lives forever.

"Thanks to God, we are now safe!" Said mother, wiping her wet face drenched in tears. We hadn't even yet started to cut the loaf, when suddenly my uncle appeared from nowhere. With a white ghostly face he informed us nervously that my two aunts were arrested in the very same station that I had an altercation with my cousin which resulted in our separation. They were arrested, trying to sell the glass of tobacco. As that it was illegal, disregarding what was the motive of it, it was considered speculation and that was a crime in the Communistic regime, and for that they put them in prison. Being that he was in the wagon, my uncle wasn't involved in this matter, and the police let him go free. Yet, my cousin followed her mother who tried to sell the makorka.

"So why did you take off?" My mother asked stupefied. "and what took you so long to contact us?"

"I was looking for you in every wagon. This train is so long!" responded my

embarrassed uncle. "But it took you a whole day!? So what do you want to do?" Asked my mother, adding angrily."You have to go back and help them in whatever! Don't you understand that your wife is arrested and needs help?". "They have money and food with them and now I am stripped from everything and I am hungry" lamented my uncle, staring at the loaf of bread. My mother looked enraged with displeasure and pitied the educated coward. She spontaneously grabbed her knife from our bag and cut the loaf in half, handing him one part of it and said; "I can only give you bread! Go back and find them!."

When we were again alone, she cut our leftover bread into portions and added with a determination "That will last longer. Any way we cant eat to much after such long starvation, eating too much we can be only sick ".

With something in our stomachs now our goal was to reach Gus-Hrustalnyi as we were encouraged by the favorable news .

The Germans were no more advancing and the Soviets finally held Moscow in their grip. But our train was going only to Gorki...which was still far from Gus- Hrustalnyi.

Our last stop was Gorki. We stepped out of the wagon at the terminal , and with a large crowd walked from the landing area into to Gorki's station interior. It was mobbed . With a quick glance I could take in this entire uninspiring picture. Over there, every station bench had been taken. A multitude of people waited for the trains while sitting or laying on the dirty floor. In spite of the big waiting hall it was lack of space and bad smell was under scribbled.

It was difficult to breath there and to look through the obscurity of this curling "clouds of the mackorka smoke ". The peoples' somber look, strongly reflected on their faces due to their situation ,were subdued and resigned even to the point of waiting for their train probably for infinity.

My mother rushed to the information booth as I watched our bundles . I could hear her ask, "When will the train go to Gus _ Hrustalnyi ?" "To Gus - Hrustanyi !? No, not to my knowledge my dear citizen ! Passenger trains are not going there " The man from the information booth answered her loudly, shaking his head. "This line is to Moscow and is only for military people . Up to now no-one can go... only the military. This place is still dangerous. This zone is restricted." We were standing there ill-fated in despair, looking at this crowd of people waiting which were trapped in the hall for many days or weeks or even months. It was "Hell" Everyone was in an

identical situation. We looked about with a frightened curiosity, and our eyes wandered off into the crowd with sadness and disbelief. So this is the end of our exploit! So this is the place where we must wait for a train which should arrive in a week, in a month in a ...? When? "Quo vadis?" No- one could tell us. With no money, only with a small piece of bread left from our travels, our hope vanished... How can we stay here? What are we to do?..Involuntarily we had surrendered to this fact. Dejected due to awareness of being alone in this unknown country we were completely lost. Have we any choices? Of course not! Our road was cut off. Our hope clouded up and this was true also for the people waiting for their train while patiently sitting on their bundles. Our effort was worthless. It was the same as to go from a heavy down-pour of rain and looking for shelter under a gutter! We had been disarranged. What kind of a solution can there be? With What steps can we proceed? There wasn't any solution!... We went back for more information, but the news wasn't encouraging... We couldn't figure out what to do next. The only way to solve this matter- was to wait and see what everyone in the station was doing up to now. We looked for a space. We spotted an small, open, area in the middle of the hall floor. We placed our bundles in the middle of this hall, holding this place as temporary refuge amongst the others that were scattered all around.

We made contact with people which surrounded us, getting information from them about this terrible situation which concerned everyone of us. Unfortunately, no-one could

tell us any more than what we already had previously faced, which wasn't too promising.

We heard that Moscow's strategic military situation turned much better but, we still unfortunately were not able to return to Gus-Hrustalnyi since there still was an impending caution in effect due to the possible danger lingering, and to wait for free travel that was opened to the public freely was a much too long of an uncertain wait. Gorki was therefore our last stop in the direction we were traveling in.

The war wasn't over and the battles were still happening. We had to wait patiently for the Red Army's successful continuation to drive the Germans away, that the road would open up completely to travel and we will be go back home. Home? where was our home? But beside that what we will do in the meantime? ...God, now how long? The night took over. There wasn't any other solution for us other than to stay overnight in this "Hell on earth"So be it! We laid down on the filthy floor, surrounded with almost shoulder to shoulder, with completely strange people like any homeless people, or a better description; as the worse vagabonds. Our first plan was to wake up early in the morning and to go to the disinfecting center as we were already itching - and hoping that maybe we will find a solution there or find the way out of this nightmare.

It was nighttime when we finished our last supply of bread. Sitting there on the floor, I could observe the whole crowd. People slept on the floor or sat on their bundles. Some eating their late supper or drinking hot Kipiatok as that was

free in every station. Some were sitting there wearing a dull face of indifference , without any curiosity , looking on with a dim flatness at one another, with a dejected spirit on their sad faces which I could see there repressive patience hide by fatigue closed of waiting so many days. Some were already accustomed to this situation and behaved as if they were in their own home. Sometimes my eyes stopped fixed at women's breasts feeding the babies or rocking them to sleep or... just looked at the crying babies . Children were lying on top of overcoats that were spread out , sleeping peacefully as if nothing had happened in this world. Some who were more fortunate had blankets . The image was depressing. The filth,the dirt ,the air and the condition was so bewailing.

Before night fell, our neighbor next to our side warned us to be careful of robbers. He told us that many pickpockets circulate within the station and that they were so skillful in their only profession ,that they were able to strip anyone while they slept and would slip away unnoticed. And.... that misfortune happened to us!

DO YOU BELIEVE IN ANGELES ?

chapter 26

The night was full .All around me I could hear all kinds of snoring. Some were light and funny and some were heavy and unpleasant.We were also very tired .My eyes started to play tricks on me.

My mother had taken the warning of the pickpockets seriously. She pulled her warm boots off her feet and placed them under her head before falling asleep to keep them hidden and safe from the robbers. "

I'm worried and horrified to lose my boots. Can you imagine me without them? Anyway ,they will serve me for a pillow." Justifying her precaution, she said, and had laid down on the bare floor ." Now, no -one will touch them!" she added satisfied . Laying and worrying for the coming day tomorrow,she told me, " I can't sleep ,and I will watch over you . Tomorrow will be another day , sleep in peace" I was tired and didn't need to be encouraged twice as my eyes couldn't stay open anymore.A minute later, I fell asleep.

" God help me ! I had been robbed! Oh my God! Oh my God! My boots are gone! God,have pity on me!

With that shout of despair I was awakened. My sleep was deep from fatigue and hunger. At the beginning I didn't realize that this scream came from my own mother. "Ma, what happened? Why are you screaming?" I questioned her half way still drunk from my sleep.I couldn't make any sense of it. "The boots... The boots were gone ! What will we do now !? How , we can now exist ? No home, not a piece of bread, no money and no one to turn to and now... no boots!". Her face was drenched with tears. She was at the end of her rope, heavily sobbing.

I was speechless. What could I say? It was terrifying moment for us .Now, on top of everything we had been stuck more than ever before, in the most desperate

of situations.... Outside it was cold. The winter was in full swing and in addition to this, this year was a very nippy one. To be without boots it would mean that we were nailed to the station. Whatever we could do, was now impossible. We were paralyzed. Our misfortune was so great and our predicament was so helpless...This undescrivable anxiety, physically and morally had disabled us. We had faced fatal destruction!" How much can a person take!?..... Oh yes and much more, as life is full of surprises... I began scratching for answers. " Can I do something from nothing? Of course not! What kind of a mess! How can we extricate from it?" I was condemned only to listen to my mother's lamentation. She was sobbing and constantly repeating in Polish to herself like a broken record: " What shall we do! What shall we do!" .Her eyes were swollen and I was worrying that she would have a nervous breakdown. Myself, I was numb by the pain , not even thinking. About what could I think! I was thunder-stroked

They say, that miracles can happen ,and it is true. Many miracles had befallen us in this hectic life. In this book that I write you can find many of them. Circumstances or miracles? I myself, with your permission will put them in a category as miracles. I, myself will tell you that my whole life was a miracle.

And that's' what happened. It was one of those miracles. While my mother lamented and talked to herself, a well dressed man, half in military and half in civilian uniform had passed by us. He stopped for a while and listened with un hidden

curiosity to my mother's Polish complaints. At first, I didn't pay any attention to him, then became annoyed with his meddling in "someone's affairs". I almost insulted him. I wanted to embarrass him, to tell him nothing would come of eavesdropping, that he is only a spectator of a human misfortune and that he shouldn't stay and listen. It is so rude! I was ready to blow up and pour all my anger caused by this mishap to this impolite fellow. But for some reason, I withheld my adolescent temper. After a short while, smiling warmly, he approached us asking my mother in a pure Polish accent; "What is the matter?" My mother who cried constantly, was relieved at last she found a soul that she could pour her sorrow out to him. She told him the whole story finishing with, "You see how ill-fated we are?" "Yes indeed I can see that, but as you are Polish, I can do something for you. In every misfortune there is a fortune", he told us, mysteriously smiling, then he turned to a man, who was standing behind him. In their short conversation which they exchanged in Polish, the bystander (a man who accompanied him) was told to go to the man's apartment and bring his very own "other" pair of boots.

We sat bewitched with our opened mouths, in shock and disbelief. We couldn't trust our own ears. We thought we were dreaming. Could it be that our fate changed at the snap of a finger: the most tragic situation which was so desperate?.. It didn't take too long for the man to come back to the station with a pair of boots, and our benefactor slipped off his own, from his feet and exchanged it with the other pair. Then, he

handed my mother his own boots still warm from his own heat(bodily). She stood there perplexed. He also apologized that the boots were maybe too big for my mother's feet ,but this was better than nothing.

My mother was in seventh heaven and so was I. Now, he said " I can't leave you over here! I want to inform you that I am an officer from the Anderson Army , representing our new Polish government at the Gorki outpost." We had listened to him like it wasn't real, but he continued; "The new administration of Poland has formed recently in the Soviet Union by General Anderson, subsidized by the Polish treasury under General Sikorski in London. We stared at him mute and stunned. Have we dreamed this up? It has to be a dream!...

"Come", he said with an inviting smile," we will discuss it in my office . We are here to help our people, but before that,I have to send you for a bath. You need to be badly disinfected. Afterwards you will go to a restaurant for dinner as you must be starving. " It had to be a dream! It just had to be a dream!... And if it was a dream we didn't want to wake up.

We followed him as if we were hypnotized, holding our breath and still bewitched .A few blocks away from the station on one of the side - street, there was a small wooden house , well kept.The Polish embassy had recently been established and this small wooden house was it.

Entering the building to the left , on the street floor inside the house , were two big sized offices, one of them belonging to our "Angel" . To the right, there was a big room which served as a social place for the refugees who were taken there. In the middle of a square entry were steps, which led to the top floor, a big sized attic. This big attic had two finished rooms with white walls and a wooden shiny floor. A few small windows from both sides provided sufficient day light . Everything inside was clean and shiny.There even was electricity, although there was no bedding. People slept on the floor on their blankets spread out , but only during the night. During the daytime everything was put away neatly leaving no trace of their remains. The atmosphere was cultural and incomparably cleaner than we had experienced during our vagabondage and also more pleasant. Someone escorted us to a bath and to a restaurant. (very modest) After having enjoyed the few dishes of hot vermicelli soup we returned to the lodge. People there, who were under the embassy's wings ,surrounded us with curiosity, asking us many questions. Everyone wanted to know from which part of

Poland we came from hoping that some information would leak out to unite the broken links between their beloved ones or their friends... Sometimes by chance , knowing one thing surprisingly enough would lead to another. They all were very warm toward us and we were accepted into the " family". These people were only from Poland ;Christens and Jews.The majority of them were the Jews .We had enough time to get acquainted with them.

After being introduced, one of them an older women, discreetly took us to the side and asked us many questions like; where in Siberia had you come from? We told her that we weren't from Siberia. We were only in possession of a Russian passport. Horrified, she looked around making sure that no one was eavesdropping , and told us whispering: " Now, listen carefully . I realize that you suffered enough, and I feel sorry for you.If you want to be eligible to receive the benefits from this organization ,you must know that this embassy is set up exclusively to help only the Polish citizens released recently from prisons and camps. The amnesty was granted from the Soviet Union, to whom in the past hasn't accepted Russian passports. You told me before that you have a Russian passport. Let's forever forget what you told me. Do not tell that to anyone as you will not be considered qualified and you will be forced out from this place back to the Gorki train-station.If you will not tell them, they have no reason not to believe you , that you are from camp. They don't have any records. This is the only way that you can save your skin. In a short time, they will call you to the office so I

advise you, be extremely cautious and do not reveal that you had a passport. Say that you just came from Siberia and you have been lost. I also advise you to destroy the Russian passports or you will be considered Russian citizens .

We were extremely thankful to this good soul. .She saved us from further suffering .

The next day after a goodnight sleep and feeling that our body was clean at last, no more bitten by lice , we were asked to come to the office, where our "Angel" received us smiling and joking ." Did you have a goodnight's rest?" , he asked us in a happy mood." So now you have the boots. Sorry for the size".He was teasing my mother. The atmosphere was pleasant . After exchanging a few jokes referring to our Gorki train-station incident, he registered us ,took some information which wasn't much. Of course we remembered the good woman's advice, and we held back what we shouldn't reveal.

They also gave us some clothes that was sent from abroad,probably from the U.S.A., telling us that we will stay there tentatively till the spring, then afterwards, everyone we will be placed and will go to work by the end of the war.

Our life was much more joyful now. The nights on the floor were not very comfortable and had deprived us of our, privacy. It was inconvenient, but we were happy since we weren't invaded by lice and that for us was the most important , and in addition to that we also had a roof over our heads and ate food twice a day eliminating that gnawing

hunger. Because our lodging hadn't any kitchen facility, we walked every day to the restaurant and had lunch and supper mostly based on the main dish: the vermicelli soup which was what food stamps could get you. Sometimes our new friends managed to supply us with extra food stamps since they themselves were more fortunate to manage somehow to get the extra stamps to give away to someone else, like us. For us that was a big help.

This restaurant which we ate at everyday, was set in a populated vicinity (near the embassy), attracting lots of different people. We liked to sit over there and mingle with them. Everyone of them was pleasant, warm and an interesting individual. The majority of them were intelligent, mostly from different places dispersed from their homes due to the war. There, we sat many times together with them at the table, eating and conversing. We could talk with them about the Red Army heroic fights, their progressing achievement, and their defeats. This was the most touching subject for all of us, as many of them were themselves victims of war from various parts of Russia. We could sit there for hours, discussing the development of the war and listen to many of their stories. That was our best distraction, away from the boring atmosphere of the lodge. We would lose ourselves in this most striking conversation, and we would catch up with what we had so long ago been missing out on, about the isolated places. Being with these people and sharing everyone's experience was informative.

One of those days, my mother and I sat in the restaurant indulging ourselves in a hot vermicelli soup and

a man squinted at us towards our direction. He was a tall, very masculine and handsome young man. "Can I join you?" he asked aggressively polite. Not waiting for our invitation, he introduced himself, telling us that he was from Moscow. The time went by very fast chatting, joking and discussing with him various subjects. From that time on we met him everyday. Subsequently, he informed us that he was a debutante actor, already participating in many plays in Gorki theater. Then I started receiving long love poems from him which after having read them, ended up in the garbage pail. With repentance I confess, that it was fun to share them, reading them to my new friend Kristina, a single Polish girl, lost with no family in the turmoil of war. She was eight or ten years older than I, but that didn't prevent us our friendship and to share a few laughs. Our new acquainted "Romeo" (that's how I will call him, as I don't remember his real name), was attracted to me. Unfortunately I was not his "Julia". I was attracted only to my vermicelli soup and not to a man of almost Kristina's age, and besides I was a shy young girl, lost in my own world, not yet thinking of romance. Once, suddenly sitting in the restaurant and eating my second helping of vermicelli soup, our "Romeo" appeared at the restaurant but not his usual self. When he noticed us his face brightened up with a big smile. He spotted us at once when he entered through the door, waving to us with something in his hand. Excited, he approached our table handing us two theater tickets and with solemnity and pride invited us to the Gorki theater. In short, he told us that he will have a

part in that play.

"I have the pleasure to invite you to a beautiful Gorki theater. I will be the most honored if you will see me in this play. Please do not say no, the theater is one of the nicest in Gorki. I promise you, that you both will enjoy it". As he was saying this, he looked at my mother for her approval in a such warmhearted way, that she couldn't refuse him. She promised him that I would be there, but instead of herself that my friend Kristina would come to see the play in place of her. Then she turned towards me saying; "Kristina will be a good chaperon and good company for you and I am convinced that you will both enjoy it very much. I myself, rather stay at the lodge as my appearance is not proper for going to a theater. I don't have an adequate dress to wear."

"What a day! I am going to the theater!" That for me was out of the ordinary. It was not too long ago that I picked cotton from the Usbekien's field, that so many times, I was so lost! I was excited the whole day. This unusual opportunity of going to the theater, I thought would never happen again in my life. The memory of the days of distress, and the days of my vagabondage disappeared into oblivion.... Kristina and I, dressed in our best, and got on the trolley. We stared out through its windows with curiosity, catching a flash of images of the streets and tall brick houses plastered with gray cement. We finally were able to see Gorki. The whole city was old and uniform, but to me it was uplifting. It was pleasant to be in the big city, feeling clean and feeling good about myself

, and riding in the trolley. It was so unlike living in remote villages and very small secluded towns. I was longing for a civilized life, but as so far, our lives were a mess...

We passed the long and great bridge where a large river Oka was flowing haughtily. Then we got out to a small woods which led to the theater. The theater's elegant structure was situated in a park. Looking at the big trees in this park, surrounding the theater's construction I could imagine their beauty in the summer time, judging by the number of (shrubs' and trees) beautiful greenery. Now, the trees were almost bare from dried, wrinkled and dark brown leaves, the remains moved by strong cold winds looking like they were made from burnt parchment paper. The ground intact, was covered with this thick layer of dried up leaves, which from the top twirled and spinet at each blow of the wind. They looked as if they were choosing a better spot to be in. The structure itself was splendid, reminding me of our little theater in Kalisz, but this one in comparison to it bigger. We stayed there for a short time admiring the building and the park which seemed to be so old, as the trees were gigantic at least two hundred years old. The snow was gone, but it was much too cold to stay outside. We arrived much earlier than we should have, nevertheless, slowly small groups of people begin filling up the theater's hall.

This theater's hall made a great impact on me and astonished me and aroused curiosity for us, and to our big delight we admired everything within it. We were so impressed by it that we couldn't restrain ourselves and showed our enthusiasm openly,

which had induced a peculiar smile on the passerby strangers. Everything was so interesting and so exciting. The long hall was spacious. Our eyes ran all over it. The large crystal chandeliers were splendid in their great lights changing their colors from blue, yellow red to ice white. The red walls ornamented with gold under these gleaming lights were impressive. The French provincial chairs and couches, which were along the side of the hall walls were luxurious. Everything looked as if it belonged in a magnificent palace. I thought that I over reacted, but looking at Kristina's face I had an impression that she too was extremely impressed and surprised as well.

In a short time the hall started to get crowded.

Far into the mob I could see my "Romeo" forcing himself through, looking for us. The moment that he noticed us, he rushed over to greet us with a proud smile.

"I am so impressed, am I in the Soviet Union?" I welcomed him not hiding my excitement.

"You certainly are!" He answered me with a big burst of laughter. "This theater was built by the Tzar, and it is conserved forever as a piece of art."

The lights flickered warning us the play was to begin, and we had rushed into the auditorium. As we entered, I thought that I was daydreaming. What splendor! This average sized auditorium looked exclusive, and resembled the opening up an expensive jewelry box that in any minute would entertain us with a beautiful melody. The walls of this auditorium were red and gold. All seats were in red velvet and so was the carpet. The

breath taking balcony , was white with heavy gold ornamentations. The ceiling was sculptured with angelic images and again the beautiful crystal chandeliers.

My "Romeo" left in a hurry to the stage room. Mute and dumb I sunk into the comfortable seat and ruminated. In regard to my past life this spectacular display of magnificent wealth made a sudden impact on me and made me react by fantasizing. It was too much of a contrast , too great of a reaction. Then I drifted off lost in my own thoughts, thinking about the forgotten era; the era of the Russian Tzar. I closed my eyes forgetting and unaware of my surroundings and only when Kristina pulled my sleeve , did I half awaken to reality. "Kristina" I said in a low voice, "Now I can imagine the old times under the Tsars' regime. The richness , the people, the crowd of the beautiful and elegant society, the distinctive refined men dressed immaculately , looking so handsome, and the ladies in their elegant dresses looking so dainty. I can even hear the rustle of the silk from their taffeta dresses and even smell their perfumes in the air... and I am in that crowd!" " No! You aren't in that crowd! " Kristina was choking with a heartfelt laugh. "You are in the crowd of today , the proletarian crowd!! Please, just open up your eyes and wake up to reality. Look all round and maybe that will help you. I wish that I had a pail of ice- cold water to pour over your head . That would help you! The performance will start shortly ."

It took me a while to brush my imagination away . "Yes, to reality!" I repeated it to myself with anguish, then I turned

my head around watching the people behind me since we were up front . Now the theater was full. Glancing through the spectators, I awoke fully from my imagination. I looked at the different audience. Indeed, the appearance was in such contrast from the one from my imagination , that in a instant I brought myself to reality. The theater's audience was dressed decently, but their careful camouflage couldn't hide the poverty of their appearance. The girls were plain as they could be dressed and combed almost looking identical with each other without any touch of elegance or femininity. They wore clothes that was available in store.

The lights went off, and the performance began. I was still so absorbed in my thoughts , that I hardly paid attention to the play, constantly missing out in the action. When it ended, I said to Kristina " What shall I say to Romeo? I really didn't pay any attention to the play. I was overwhelmed by my thoughts. I am sure that he will ask me if I was impressed with his performance"

"Just say that he was terrific... that's what he would like to hear from you, and about the play I will tell you all about it on our way home .We left the theater in a hurry as it was late.

The dream ended and reality was that we had to return to our familiar lives.

The news from the front was flowing in more favorably. The German offense ended. The fights concentrated now ,to push them from the Russian territory, but that was intense and bloody. More and more wounded men came in from the battle fields. The major

help was the winter itself. The Germans were trapped in Russian territory facing there the full fury of the Russian winter. The forty two degrees centigrade of frost and the heavy snow falls were difficult for them to withstand. Their "Blitz krieg" was over!! Both sides ferociously fought battles. The Red Army's division pushed the Germans completely out from the outskirts of Moscow, but could no longer we go to Gus- Hrustalnyi since we discarded our passports. That was 10 years of Siberia.

We were still in the city of Gorki , when the good news reached us informing us of the German blockade which had been broken up ,which surrounded the city of Leningrad for a long time.The trains containing the war victims started to arrive at Gorki. Heroic Leningrad was freed at last ! What we heard from those Leningraders;the stoics ,the courageous ones , those utmost in bravery.The stories were astonishing to the whole Soviet nation. To be safe and to keep from being attacked by the Germans , people of Leningrad worked days and nights in the ammunition plants, using even the youngest children of ages, six and even younger,just to get production going - to protect their city.During this period of time they hardly slept. They would feed themselves eating cats they killed or the meat of rats and there even were accidents of cannibalism... just to survive.To be that heroic... only the Russian people could undergo such a resistance.

Leningrad was the second largest, major industrial city in the Soviet Union, with a significant strategic outpost in the north-west of the Soviet Union .There, they built ships and manufactured weapons, including heavy tanks. The Germans recognizing this cradle of importance, strived with every force to capture Leningrad.

The Germans encircled this city with the most strongest and most important of their forces.The people in Leningrad realized this dangerous situation; to be in this type of

predicament and to be caught without any help whatsoever. The Leningraders trained themselves militarily therefore, as a separate army to be able to defend themselves in their own city.

At first, they tried to evacuate children and pregnant women by traveling in narrow passages through the devastated station of Mega which had still remained in existence for a short time. The Germans who disregarded this innocent Red Cross cargo, bombed the trains anyways and finally obliterated them.

On July 1941 the Germans slowly penetrated into Leningrad fighting bitterly. The city's factories were converted to produce mines where women and children worked there too. Constantly being under bombardment, many places were burnt down in the city. Flames devoured warehouses containing food and medicine. Food and medicine delivery was almost impossible. Only a narrow strip of water across the Lake Ladoga connected the Leningraders with the rest of Soviet Union. It was only possible to reach it in the winter time when the lake was frozen.

On the city streets were barricades. People had placed sandbags and bricks on their windows to defend and protect themselves. Everyone was prepared to fight to the very end against their enemy.

Every building was turned into a fortress. The war took to the streets. Many Soviet people abandoned their homes and fled escaping to surrounding forests. Many workers either joined the army or were evacuated with their businesses and factories.

Industrial enterprises began producing for the military. The fighting was bitter and hard. Hitler possessed with a fanatical hatred become so hysterical by the Soviet power in Leningrad when he was defeated by their stoic defense. As a result he destroyed everything he saw there with passion.

The Germans without any scruples mostly targeted hospitals, schools, theaters and museums. The most beautiful of buildings collapsed one by one. Even rich Russian art cherished from the time of the Tzar's regime (his Petersburg) was demolished.

For this duration, the city was shelled continually by guns. People lived on 150 grams of bread which was ersatz. In winter they burned their own furniture for fuel in bone chilling frost. Nevertheless, The people of Leningrad declared that they would eat stones, rather than surrender. The siege of Leningrad was one of the greatest battles fought in human history....

.... Six hundred thousand Leningraders died but the city didn't fall.

What a relief it was for us when the good news reached the city of Gorki, learning that Leningrad was finally out of danger! Yet, when the people from Leningrad began arriving seeking medical help, it was petrifying to hear how costly in essence their sacrifice and their stoic struggle had been for survival.... The enormous casualties of war brought on the deepest of grief and sadness to everyone of us around.

The embassy wasn't able to support us anymore. The Soviet's government closed Ours embassy of a political matter, and in the early spring it was time to send us to work outside the city of Gorki .

A sewing shop where we had been directed in to work at, was also one of the evacuated ones from the Ukraine. They promised to keep us busy right up till the end of war, but they didn't tell us that we would be placed for lodging in a nearby village.

So, the eight or more families (I do not clearly remember exactly the number) said goodbye to the embassy's staff and headed to the train station. Kristina stayed in Gorki together with the organization crew . Then , later when the embassy was closed due to a dispute between two countries; Russia and Poland, (Poland being in exile), she went with the embassy's staff through Persia (the Middle East) and then joined Anderson's Army in Italy.

My mother and I together (with the small group) came to a small town Bogorodsk. From there we were drawn by horse - cart, then we walked a few kilometers to a small isolated settlement "Posiolek," where a shop was located. It was at this shop that we were supposed to work in. Barely a few people resided in this settlement. There were only three long barracks. There was also a bread- kiosk which was always closed , and only opened in the mornings merely for one hour , which

after that time all the bread had already been sold. Then there was a cafeteria in which we would mostly consume cabbage soup "Shchy" twice a day. The soup was so thin that the shredded cabbage swam freely. That would entice us to joke about it frequently, saying to each other that "one end of the shred is following the other" Maybe to you its not so funny but to us, it was. Sometimes we were able to find two or three small cubed pieces of meat in the soup, ,but that was exceptional.If you were friendly with a person who was in charge of distributing this National Dish , the soup would be thicker and an extra peace of meat had a chance to be in your dish. The only utensils with which we could eat from were, from wooden dishes.Spoons were our own private one(not because of hygiene but because the cafeteria didn't supply any)It belonged to us... To wash it,it was another matter...

In addition to this "generous" meal ,a piece of bread of four hundred fifty grams was allotted to us (individually).(bought in the mornings and gulped in a second) , but the hard labor workers and" the privileged" people (party men) received seven hundred fifty grams. daily a piece. The bread was black . The bread usually used to be very savory, but in times of war it was mixed with potatoes, which meant the bread was clay-like, tasteless and grew heavier daily on the scale .Every day the piece of bread had diminished in volume as well. A long barrack was made into a shop. Two others in equal size were of some distance from our working place. Those were occupied by the Tartars who were forced to resettle in from their country

since they were considered a dangerous element to the Communistic regime. They, shunned away from everyone with an obvious hatefulness, so we never had anything to do with them.

There was one building a few story high with apartments for the directors and for their immediate staff; the party men. Our first day we were only introduced to the staff and to work in the assigned shop. Then we returned to the village by walking over three miles to see our new residence. There weren't any transportation; not from our residence nor for other places from this settlement. The few horses which belonged to the collective farms(kolkhoz), were used for far more important tasks other than transporting people.

Our group settled into the few empty houses in near village, but as for my mother and I an "incomplete family", (this was only an excuse for the lack of space) we were placed with a family of four, who consisted of a husband and a wife a small boy and a girl of my age.

The wooden hut which was designated to us was very small and run down. It was the last one on the street.

But it had only one room with a big Russian stove. It didn't even have an entry. In this room there weren't any furniture, only bare walls and one window and the stove. The upper stove level about one yard from the ceiling, was flat like a table, allowing two people to be fairly comfortable to lay down side by side one another, and to also accomplish that which was necessary; to crawl to reach the surface using a narrow ladder.

In the house ,there wasn't any ground or underground water system.Water was carried into the house.It was brought by pails from a street water pump which was a block or two or more from the house. There wasn't any facility whatsoever . There, life was primitive as could be. In every village and even every small town the outhouses were completely open in the back of their house.It was very embarrassing, and in the winter it was awful.The waste which was eliminated from our body froze rapidly in mid air.Frost protected people from a possible epidemic. In the early spring the waste was cleaned up and thrown as fertilizer on fields.

My mother and I,constantly suppressed by in our past hard life , gladly accepted our placement with a strange family, hoping to develop a nice relation with them, nevertheless ,it wasn't our choice to be with them. As we were only two , and they were four, we accepted their proposition to take lodging on the stove and give them the space in the room. But sometimes modesty doesn't pay. It was very difficult to dress in that position only a yard from the ceiling. Being limited to only that area, it was not easy at all, always bumping our heads and other parts of our bodies.

But in the coldest months in the winter fury,when the frost was acute and the snow was falling ,it was then that it was blissful to have this escape, stretching out on its warm surface.

The family with which we shared the house had in a much better situation than we . The man was a cobbler.He got a small table and started to repair every villagers's shoes at home.As

they lacked a cobbler due to the war , our roommate was paid for his services with all sorts of food. The villagers hadn't much money. They paid him with nature and that was more convenient for the cobbler and even more profitable . As of that, his family never went hungry . To them milk, eggs ,grains and potatoes were never shortages. Having these possessions, this valuable food ,his family grew more and more uncomfortable with us. Knowing that my mother and I lacked such sources, they avoided us like a plague, and they ate hiding from us. Their attitude toward us grew unfriendly and even got hostile. Every day when it was time to eat their meals my mother and I would try to leave the house, as much as we could to give them their privacy. In the night time my mother and I, hungry, would cling on the stove holding on to one another as we would fall asleep in the discomfort and shed tears. We were constantly very ,very hungry and above that very humiliated. Our Russian neighbors welcomed my mother in their homes. The people in the village liked my mother and me. Knowing our situation, many of them , lots of times forced my mother to accept for me a few cold potatoes left from their supper or a peace of stale bread, slipping it into her pockets, after she had been also forced to eat. During Christmas time we were always invited numerous times, to their homes for a special "Shchy" cabbage soup made with pork meat and fats for this holiday season. On this rare occasion only once a year , they would kill a pig for themselves. The villagers although poor, were in a better situation than my mother and I and had the advantage of being in their homes. To be homeless was

dismal...

The peasants working in the collective farms were doing poorly but the more laborious one could always cope better than the average ones. In Communistic Russia no-one owned any land, but the government did allow anyone in the village, to cultivate for themselves their own produce for their personal usage. Some villagers also kept a goat or two, or the more fortunate; a cow and a pig and sometime a few chickens. They seldom consumed their own sources, as they were in need of other necessary things, so their own goods were traded in and the rest went to taxes to the Collective Farm (in form of nature).

Every day we would rise, very early in the morning and walk over three kilometers to the shop. We were off from work only Sundays and National holidays.

Walking to the "Pasiolek" we always merged with the village girls, who worked with us at the same place. It was much more pleasant to walk during the summertime since there was greenery all around from the forests and fields. These girls on our way would sing, laugh, joke walking in the middle of the road, where they could spontaneously throw themselves into a dance, uplifting us as we, my mother and I were on the verge of misery. They were so natural and happy in their lives, naive, not knowing that exist happier and better life, but not in their own country.

But in the winter time the situation was different. The long walks and exposure to the cold on the road full of snow was burdensome. Many times the road was covered with drifts and was difficult to

follow. The roads were never plowed. Snow would pile up layer after layer. At five a clock in the morning when we got up from our beds it was still pitch black outside. There weren't any lights on the streets or the roads and only the moon illuminated our way. When there were overcast it was completely dark and treacherous. We conquered every step of snow, wading through this obstacle. (from the previous night's snow fall as the snow fall was very frequent). The snow in the moonlight glittered with millions of small twinkling stars, illusory blue, which always gave us the impression that it was colder that it actually was. In the open space the wind was rough, penetrating our bones. Covered with kerchiefs, so that only our eyes were exposed, we struggled in this condition many times with tears. Many times we couldn't uncover the road's tracks. But when there were days in which it did not snow, we would walk briskly on the beaten paths with a much better mood.. Worst of all was the fear of wolves roving by from the forest. (The forest was on our way). There always was a possibility that wolves would attack people walking by. In the winter they were hungry and more aggressive than in the summer. (In the summer time, they would hide in the density of the forest) These wolves would frequently be seen by people on roads walking out from their dens or they would attack the village barns during the nights. The only way to frighten a wolf was to walk in groups and make lots of noise. Knowing that, we were more secure and we purposely were very noisy, loudly singing and yelling to startle them. The winters' days were very short, so when we returned

home , we also walked in the darkness of the night .

The Russian girls in the winter wore valionki, felt boots. When it was wet outside they would put galoshes on the valionkis. Their biggest investment were these warm felt boots since the winter was long and very cold. But, the poor villagers couldn't afford even that. Their feet and legs were wrapped in tatters (from old clothes) up to their knees and they put on their "bast" shoes which were made of straw.

My mother's boots as well as those of my own finally wore out and we also couldn't afford new ones. Our salary was not even sufficient for an extra piece of bread which was expensive, and only attainable on the black market. We could only cover our expenses for the cafeteria and to pay our own allotment of bread. So therefore, we wore our "bast" shoes just like the shoes the poor villagers wore. They came in three sizes ; small , medium and large. They were roomy .Our feet were wrapped with a thick layer of rags up to the top of our calves and tied criss-cross with long braids(made from straw,) attached to the "bast-shoes".The straw created good insulation , protecting us from the cold. It was alright stepping into the crisp snow which was always dry; never melted with this type of foot-wear. We could wear them an entire winter without wetting our feet as well as not exposing them to the danger of frost bite . But, in late spring , even when the temperature was still cold at day time, the sun's rays melt the snow to some degree. The melting procedure was at the surface only, and excess water escaped through the thickness to the bottom of the snow

&,making tunnels under it. In the night it was still very cold so in the morning it was very deceptive because the water beneath didn't always freeze. When it did melt it turned slush like . Walking to work , my mother and I were constantly looking for a better path to make sure as to keep our feet from getting wet, but we couldn't always prevent the bad spot. We always ended up by stepping into a deceptive layer of snow, unable to remove our legs, and our straw shoes and instantly got drenched with the ice water from underneath the snow. When we started our walk anew, we continued to flounder about in the misleading puddles. It got so horrible in deeper ones that , we both hugged each other and sobbed for comfort. At that time we only wanted to die. But... we didn't die. As a consequence we only contracted boils which covered our legs with ugly scabs for a long time.

Being that I was a young adult and it was summer time , I began assimilating and I joined the village youth to socialize. It was customary and very delightful, when after supper , a young man would come out into the street, playing his accordion "chastushki," (short rhyming folks songs), then would walk down the streets of the village followed by his friends coming out of their homes one by one. They followed him in singing. Hearing Chastushki from the outside, in an instant from every house in the village where the youngsters lived , they would come out to join the crowd. They would stroll up and down along the streets under the dark navy -blue sky covered with stars and the moon, singing along and greeting the one who still

joined them consecutively... and would completely forget their worries. When they ended their walk through the whole village, these young men singing in the front would surround the accordionist, and the girls in the back, sang in accompaniment of the boys in the front and the player altogether with their beautiful voices. (The Russian girls mostly had good voices) After an hour or so, they would visit someone's hospitable house who was willing to accommodate the crowd for a social hour. There, they gathered together singing melancholic old Russian songs and talked about their missing friends who were serving in the Army or had been killed in battles.

Their melodic voices were soft, melancholic full of emotion and soothing, and when the room was big enough for a dance, they would throw themselves about majestical, whirling in ecstasy of the "kozatchok", followed in by the boys. They were so light and graceful! They were full of electricity.

This was the only distraction I had in the village.

Many families in the village were informed of their lost husband, father, brother, son or boyfriend. Someone was daily hit with such misfortune constantly.

The situation for food worsened day by day. Hunger spread like a curse. My stomach was crying S.O.S.

Working in the shop, sewing at the machine big, long stitches, I would look at the spools of threads in front of me many times. (Spools of threads were trading items for food) I imagined how big of a piece of bread I could get for trading in only - one bobbin of thread, if I only were brave enough

to steal it, O! how much milk could I drink. I had already forgotten the taste of milk.

One day I made a decision. " Today I will steal it without a doubt!" I repeated it to myself many times. But when the end of the day approached, my conscience stepped in and I didn't want to take the risk. I said to myself;" It is early summer, and I could satisfy my hunger walking by the forest on the outskirts feeding myself by picking berries. In the field I could also pull carrots from the soil and eat them on the spot, dirty, and unwashed, or later in the season I could indulge myself with cucumbers and cabbage abandoned in the fields due to the lack of working hands. I was just like an animal or a primitive cave person squandering in the fields looking for what was eatable . I was young, still growing, hungry and scared to death of losing my teeth because of vitamin deficiency. Many young people lost their teeth due to scurvy. This nourishment alas, only temporarily helped satisfy my hunger unfortunately. My hunger was so powerful that nothing distracted me from the desire of possessing those threads . I kept dreaming of them. My determination possessed me. The thought nurtured me more and more. I was overtaken by a strange power . This endless desire always comeback when my hunger grew to the point of desperation. I was for so many years hungry! I was more and more determined to proceed with my plan... To steal! To taste! I already imagined what and with whom I would trade it. My resolution was affirmed that "it" had to be done. My mind was made up! And on a particular day I sat fantasizing the

delightful imagery of food and its taste and smell . I finally decided that I would definitely possess it . I closed my eyes .Finally I attempted to extend my arm to snatch the bobbin, but for some reason my arm became stiff. I had to withdraw it.Remorse dominated me. I felt filthy, unethical and unreserved dealing with my hunger. I felt shameful and disgraceful.I shivered like a dog in the rain ,thinking so very negatively about myself.I couldn't do it! As the work day was over and everyone started to leave their work benches, advancing to the exit, our formam blocked the exit door and announced through the speaker, that " everyone of us had to freeze where we were. There would be a checkout at the door. If someone took something that didn't belong to them , they should not remove it from their pockets or bags." The unexpected event frightened everyone and they exchanged horrifying glances. We understood, that if someone was found guilty and is caught, they would pay severe consequences .That day, ten girls were caught with the snatched bobbins in their pockets.Ill- fated, they were sentenced by the "traveling court"(the settlement was too small to have a courthouse) to four months and sent to prison. The girls sobbed hysterically .I was sympathetic with them. My heart sunk when I reflected that it could have been me in their shoes ,with almost only one wrong move

It was so blissful to be spared by my own conscience which made me stay away from stealing. That would have been the end to me. I would have gotten arrested, but my destiny didn't exactly spare me, or maybe it was simply bad luck. I HAD COMMITTED A CRIME. It is "to long of a story for such a "big" crime, for which I did pay consequences, but I will tell you all about it anyway; Exhausted from walking back and forth to work and struggling with constant hunger which had drained my young body, I overslept a few times, due to my tiredness and because of that I was three times late at work for fifteen minutes. It was difficult for me to wake up so early in the dark, winters' mornings, from a heavy sleep, probably due to my exhaustion. I never could distinguish mornings from nights, drained by my daily activities. I couldn't believe that my CRIME was; the few minutes late for work. I was found guilty by an arrogant woman - judge, sitting behind a table, placed outside of our shop right in the open air. There wasn't any court in this small place and the judge would come only in a particular time." The court" was not whatsoever interested with my reason for being late, and didn't even want a short explanation from me. I wasn't allowed even to open up my mouth in my defense.... The court, reading only out loud the foreman's complaints against me, with no hesitation, found me guilty and sentenced me for six months of hard labor in the neighboring peat - bogs. There was no doubt and it was

understood by all, that the court was trying to fill up the gap of missing workers for the peat -bug, trying to replace those who left and joined the army.

My prison term started in August. The one only advantage I had, working in hard -labor was my allotment of bread being bigger than a slice but didn't help quench my hunger at all.

The enormous forest grubbed consisted of a large territory of the peat - bug which was intertwined with many narrow railroad tracks in its background .(Everywhere you turned there were forests) The big wet land was full of peat growing , from which solid lumps of decayed grass had been dug up in the form of cubes. The heavy marsh, full of water, was simply disposed of onto the ground .After they had lost their moisture, they had to dry in the open air. These cubes were stacked in the form of pyramids for the sun to dry them up completely. The field was full of these pyramids. When the cubes of peat were dry as a bone, we loaded them into heavy metal push-wagonettes .The wagonettes were upon the narrow railroad tracks. (This reminded me of a coal-mine). When the wagonette was loaded to the top, the two of us (my coworkers and I) pushed them onto the tracks which led to a platform where a gigantic freight wagon always waited to be loaded. The push wagonettes weren't always in good shape making it more difficult for us to move the load. As we all were young, we would still laugh in the most distressful time, joking at everyone of our misfortunes. When the wagonettes were stuck on the track and couldn't move them any further, we pushed it exerting and helping ourselves using our muscles in

accompaniment of a old song" The march of the Russian Boat Man"; "Davay uhnyem e yeshcho uhnyem..." push and push again and so forth... We felt that this kind of work was an injustice to us. This labor made us feel like we were indeed enslaved in Siberia, but in this regime it was wiser to keep our comments or feelings to ourselves since otherwise ... we would surely be in Siberia.

The peat moss was a vital heating source for factories and home fuel; a good substitute instead of wood or coal. In the Soviet Union production of coal was underdeveloped so the peat was much more cheaper....

Loading the peat into these big freight wagons was not easy. We were constantly speeding, rushed by a foreman to make the supply run on time. We were always moving swiftly without taking a breath. We were two of us loading big bushels with the peat and placing it on the shoulder of a third person, who was carrying it and dumping its contents into the wagon. This hasty work for fifty minutes of every hour, was so quick making us sweat in the cold, and after this race, we would rest for ten minutes. That break was for a cigarette, call it; zakurka. (Neither one of us smoked). But the rest, from running we needed badly, and we always tried to make it a little longer. We also worked there in the night shifts. We didn't load peat during the night. The loading was made by an earlier shift onto a tractor's platform and at night, the tractor would bring in the loaded peat from the excavated field. Our work was to unload it into the wagons. While working every night we could see, the dark navy sky light

up just like a movie screen. Painted with electronic projector lights, it looked similar to geometric designs, that were used for spying on enemy planes. The blasting of rockets were like fireworks being displayed in the sky and were also very frequent. Every day this dark night's horizon was filled with scarlet, yellow and orange lights, as a result of the knocked down German planes which somehow snuck through the Soviet line, attempting to target the big Dierzynsky factory, where the Soviets manufactured cars and tractors. In the time of war the factory's production was transformed to produce the newest tanks and that was an important target for the Germans. That factory was very close to Gorki ..and to us. So, working in this vicinity in this somehow threatening of places, in this sky at night, was well visible the integral theatre of war activity. Being there during our work and looking constantly at this picture of the air-war so clear in front of us, that our concentration was directed to the sky. Each new outburst of rockets had provoked our emotions. It was stimulating and inspiring to us when we could see from time to time on this horizon of war, the lights of the explosions, which we welcomed with an accompaniment of joyful screams of support. Did you ever scream of joy? If yes, you can imagine, our ecstasy. The ecstasy came from knowing that an enemy plane was hit. Each time when it happened we were shouting with glee, expressing our delight and strong feelings, toward the air forces, knowing that the victory will surely come soon. Our only worry was that it could be possible, that if German planes

&were lost in our vicinity, they would be in position of blindly bombing our railroad tracks ,where we worked. But that never happened.

I was working fiercely , constantly running back and fourth with a full bushel topped with peat moss on my shoulder. After many hours I was uncomfortable . My back was hurting .Although the peat- brick wasn't heavy , the big bushel was and weighted me down. Changing the bushel from one shoulder to another was helpful for a short time only.Then again my back would ache with an excruciating and dull pain.

The ten minutes (zakurka) was helping me to relax. One day at work in the time of Zakurka, I stretched my sore back and with a painful grimace sat down on the heap of the just unloaded peat by the tractor, happy to rest. Snow had already slightly covered the heap and our working surface. We worked in groups of fifteen girls.Everyone of them were Russian. One of them a big and strong, ten year older and twice taller then I, started without reason assaulting me with an anti-Semitic vulgarity. This kind of remark angered and frustrated me to the utmost, as I had escaped from Polish and German persecution to this"Proletarian Country " which so strongly preached the equality of the human race, and where I was looking for refuge. Under the wings of Communism I strongly believed in my rights to stand up for myself.

For sometime I just ignored this nasty girl ,hoping that she would calm down, but she didn't stop being offensive.The more I was silent and ignored her hostility ,the more she attacked

me. I didn't have a single soul on my side , to be in my defense . I was only under the fire of everyone's mocking eyes. Concentrating on my situation , I quickly determined that I had to do something fast. But what? She didn't have any intention to stop insulting me. My common sense told me; "I had to do something!". I was so nervous that I could feel my pulse start to race. I concentrated. The break ended. Everyone grabbed their loaded bushels and so did I. The moment when the bushel had landed on my shoulder and I could see that girl from the corner of my eyes, taking off at the same time as I did ,also heaving a bushel of peat on her shoulders, Still holding in to the bushel I rapidly bend down from my waist as low as I could, and with my head forward , I started aiming at her like an angry bull (in the direction of my enemy) ,who hadn't any idea of what I was doing. With my tripled power due to my anger I plunged my head just in the middle of her stomach. (My neck hurt for a few hours) She immediately lost her balance together with the bushel still sitting she carried on her shoulders ,and... fell as big as she was, on the platform covered with snow , grotesquely sliding with wide open eyes, shocked wearing a stupid look. Everyone started to laugh. I was the victor. My "Goliath" was defeated and I gained recognition from my group. From that incident on no- one in this group ever insulted me again right up till the end of my sentence.

The favorable news from the front line now reached us regularly. Moscow wasn't anymore in danger. Stalingrad was many time captured and lost. The combats were bloody and when at the

end ,Stalingrad was taken back for good , the city was leveled to the ground by the bombardment and the ferocious battles . We also had to work like soldiers on the front,in our own battle field, under the illuminated sky and under a spectacle of cascades of fire thrown from Katushas.

The winter was very, very cold, about minus 40-45 centigrade . We were bundled thoroughly dressed in tufted, green-moss wind breakers full of cotton,and the same were pants and boots with galoshes, supplied by the establishment,and also had big kerchiefs over our faces which was constantly covered with layers of solid ice from the vapor of our own respiration from the exposure to the cold. In spite of our warm garments it was necessary to constantly move around to avoid from freezing. The frost didn't allow us to rest for a minute. In spite of our activity our hands and feet rapidly froze cold. For a break we got into a small shipper's shack to warm up at the fire place. Inside the shack ,constructed only for the winter, there was a constantly burning stove fed with peat .There, inside the shack we could dry our gloves and remove the ice from our frozen kerchiefs. Delighted with the heat there we spent our Zakurka breaks there.

Some of the native girls often brought from their homes raw potatoes which had been baked in ashes. They tasted so good!

I could eat them without limit, but unfortunately, we were limited to one and that was a banquet too!

In addition to the harsh winter I was afraid of the wolves. From the forest which surrounded the peat-bug area, we could hear

in the night the wolves howling . With the winter's severity ,many times they would come out from the forest hungry, lurking on booty.Each time as we were hearing the howling, we got very noisy. The noise was our only weapon to intimidate them from a possible attack. Scared as we were of them, we made lots of loud babble ; singing and screaming our noise scattered far away ,echoing and reverberating our sound against the forest walls. That continued till the end of December, to the very end of my prison term.

BOGORODSK

Our sewing shop moved from Pasiolek to Bogorodsk before my term ended at the peat bog ended. The shop moved into town to a larger space to accommodate its working facility. My mother was compelled to join her work team..She(and I after my term in the peat bog finished) were placed at a Russian widow's house ,together with two others single girls. Being that these two girls were employed by the sewing shop's - kitchen(A small cafeteria where meals were prepared.) They were able to bring clandestinely, food from there to the widow's home. In difficult times food was more valued than money. Therefore, they were considered an asset to the widow.

But, from my mother's part, our landlady couldn't expect anything of benefit ,since my mother and I worked in production only. So, naturally we weren't her favorites. She, the landlady was unable to go against government's ruling of our placement there with her. Placement was strictly enforced by the government .In Russia you don't dare oppose to the government, even if you own your own home. Since she had no choice but to accept us as boarders per government, she banished us off where she kept her one only goat, in a small ,unheated antechamber. My mother accepted this degrading condition as she didn't want to aggravate the landlady, keeping this type of discrimination to herself. Being used to so many past hardships ,we could certainly bear this one more. As we were two vulnerable creatures it was easy to

manipulate us. Only in the mornings were we allowed to change our clothes in a warm room; running from the icy antechamber to a "restricted" place. (the other room)

.... And again our eider-down had saved our lives...

But before I had reunited with my mother and settled into this house ,I experienced a mishap. I have to tell you about my trip coming into town. Now , so many years later, I recall my own insanity of my wild excursion, which was influenced by my co-workers.I can't stop, pondering this one particular episode which happened to be one of several others, remembered as a nightmare. When my last day of work on the peat bog had come to an end , a bunch of us girls and myself , who had also finished their term in the peat bog, had planned to head to Bogorodsk. To go into town wasn't a very simple issue. There weren't any trains available, nor busses nor horses, so the only transportation we had, were our own very legs. In those last days of punishment , we worked the night shift. Then after a good rest and supper in a cafeteria, we decided to walk to Bogorodsk.Our supper was as every day without exception, as was customary Shchy with a small leftover piece of bread . Knowing how important it was to be fit for this long walk, we ate before we would start our walk . Everyone of us had saved a piece of bread from our daily ration specially for that reason. It was at lest 18 kilometers to reach Bogorodsk . I don't remember why we were hastily motivated to go during the night. I presume that we were all so loathsome of the peat-bog , that we

wanted to be so faraway from it as we could possibly be . Now I can admit that it was a foolishness to rush and to submit ourself to the night's jeopardy.

It was past midnight when we finished relaxing in the cafeteria. We started to walk towards the town. It was one of the coldest Russian nights . The air was dry and crisp at minus 45° c or maybe even colder . The dark ,calm navy sky was in the purest shadow as can be. The moon partially showing itself was spangled with a striking gold color, looking so artificial ,like an electric fixture attached to a navy ceiling,and was surrounded with a million bright ,blinking stars .It seemed as if the moon and the stars were the only things alive. It was as if they lit the road we took and guided us through the strange world. Besides the moon and the stars, everything else slept under the layers of snow ,(diamond studded icy flatness). It was so deserted , dark and cold in the middle of this level land, that to me everything didn't look real.It just felt like " Twilight zone ".

Our walk was long and difficult.From the bitter cold the glassy frozen surface untouched by human footprints, was so delicately thin and shiny in the light of the moon and the stars reflecting their outer lustre ,that it created an illusion of a mirror. We were enveloped in the darkness on a big white space looking for the trace of a road barely existing.It seemed like the only thing was the moon which observed us with strange curiosity. The road was treacherous. It was difficult to follow and easy to be lost in that gigantic space. The territory was so flat that even

in the day light it wasn't easy to follow that ocean of snow.

Yet, the native girls were perfectly acquainted with this remoteness. Frequently, they have paced that route. Their positive attitude made me feel that they knew the right direction. We mainly concentrated on the shiny tracks that were , stamped by someone's sleigh, previously used in the day time. But as the traffic was rare at daytime, the tracks(if there were any) sometimes had disappeared, or sometime were slightly covered with a dusting of snow induced by a drift and that was enough to lose our way in this obscurity . Wrapped in this icy darkness and losing track of time (neither one of us had watches as that was a rare luxury) we probably were lost many times, but the girls didn't reveal it, so, bravely somehow we managed to walk through the snow.

Then... we heard the howling of wolves. We had already advanced too many kilometers to return, and even so... going back , we would only face the same type of conditions as well as the same situations . Some of the girls were equipped with flash lights against the wolves, if an emergency occurred. .(A big protection! isn't it?) They told me that wolves, are afraid of lights. These girls were prepared in every way, knowing that in winter , wolves' assaults were quite frequent. But before we had ever started our journey , they never mentioned this possible danger to me. I was in panic the entire way. The lights and the noise which came from us, was very helpful, or maybe we were simply very lucky. We sang the " Chastushki " (short rhyming folklore songs) as well as other

songs which came to mind as we traveled on the road. When our repertory was exhausted, we started in by alternately dancing and screaming and once again by singing the entire way. We were very brave, and maybe everyone of us was awfully frightened, but no one admitted to it. Along the road, in the light of the moon and the stars we walked boldly in the accompaniment of the loud crackling sound of snow under the marching feet of the active young adventurers like us..In the early morning, when the town was still in deep sleep and the shroud of night started fading slimly away,, we arrived safely into town, our vocal cords were sore for a few days.

Staying for sometime in town, I was hospitalized with a chronic Malaria attack(the gift which I had brought from the peat bug. There constantly was an invasion of the Malaria mosquitoes and we weren't protected from them) spending several weeks in a hospital. The Hospital's condition was deplorable. Being used to any conditions I tolerated it as well. When I had left the hospital, my friends made fun of my looks, asking me if I changed my race. My skin became very yellow from the big doses of Quinine and I looked Chinese.

Still not Malaria attacks; shaking violently and that didn't like me to the end of my journey.

The war continued, but every day was a new victory to be celebrated in the Soviet Union. The support from the U.S.A. forces and the help of victuals was a tremendous support to the Russians. Even the situation in the country had highly improved because of American aid. For the very first time in Russian history provisions such as dry milk and powdered eggs were supplied to families with children. Such

nourishment was new to this country and this was its introduction supplied by the U.S. A. For food stamps American flour was also sometimes available...but rarely. We felt that America was behind us since our daily life changed. Every American goods, were admired and had delighted the Russian people. Unfortunately it was distributed mostly for the party people.... therefore, time to time it was sold on the black market.

The streets of Bogorodsk were full of soldiers suddenly dressed to the last detail in their new uniforms, appropriate to the climate, never seen before. Especially the pilots (located in our town), were really well dressed. The faces of military men were before depressed yet, now they smiled, shining with happiness and their eyes sparkled triumphantly. The soldiers were also provided with American chocolates and with American cigarettes, so frequent impressing their girlfriends with them. The American trucks and jeeps, never before on Russian soil, were now speeding on the streets of Bogorodsk, in a shocking contrast to the updated Soviet one.

About January -February 1943 The news quickly spread of the newest event. The German division, under the famous General Von Poulus's Sixth Army with their commander-in-chief had surrendered to the Red Army. That was a big blow to the Germans. This defeat was a celebration in this country and a bigger boost to the Russian soldiers. The streets' speakers were bursting with new Army patriotic songs and marches to the tribute to the Army and their leaders. People started more frequently to smile, looking forward to the nearness of the

end of war , and even began attending cinemas to see American films like " The big Strauss's Waltz ". They started to breath with relief and with hope and trust for a better future. A new blood started to run through in their veins as they were positively assured of the coming victory.

And the victory was every day! It was also a good feeling to have , to know that the American and English soldiers were fighting together a mutual enemy.

The fights on the fronts were ferocious. They pushed the Germans further and further back, discovering in each advancement the dreadful and ugly and inhumane terrifying facts... The people of Russia were angry , and the anger was so intensely ignited, that it affected everyone of us, spreading widely like a plague. The hate towards the Germans was to an extreme amount.

Everyone was so excited by the German's downfall , that patriotism was displayed everywhere in every way. People supported the army; morally showing to them their solidarity which was amazing. They worked intensely, making production possible .They awoke from their disappointment , which made them work very aggressively.

And every day brought us new accomplishment. The Army's achievement was enormous. People were so excited by this, that numerous women joined the army. Those women who were still civilians , ardently replaced men, who abandoned the most difficult and physical of work to join the army.. It was a total and complete solidarity.

At our place we sewed warm blankets for the Army's horses, to protect them from frost bites..

The Germans, by contrast didn't even have the opportunity cover themselves. Their well fitted army cloaks were not sufficient for this freezing weather. How paradoxical this was ! The Germans started to freeze. They couldn't withstand the cold Russian winter. The frost ,the snow fall and the blizzard conditions were new to them. Their shiny boots and their beautiful, impeccable, uniforms weren't suitable for that severity of the Russian winter. The collected furs and underwear by their own country; their Fatherland,(by their wives ,mothers and sisters) , once accumulated from plunder from occupied countries , couldn't help them at all. The German's couldn't withstand the Russian's winter preponderance.

But where I was on the streets of Bogorodsk, the loud speakers transmitted new military songs saturating heroic sentiments to the country and their leaders.The enthusiasm was so great that we were all electrified with a new burst of energy, which was contagious. Working with such renewed energy we produced over the standard requirement of the day. We were mostly young, so with complete delight we pushed a triple efficiency. In every ones' mind was only the matter of the fabric, the spools of threads and the push of the machine pedal up to the breaking point. Without exception, everyone took the situation very seriously, knowing that every ones' effort was important to win this horrible war. Everyone had someone dear fighting at the fronts, so the desire was even greater.

Besides the very inspiring news from the front, the trains constantly arrived to Bogorodsk station from the front line , full of wounded soldiers. The hospitals in our town burst out with an unrealistic amount of victims of war. It was a horrifying picture of trauma. It deserved much pity and admiration specially for the so many young boys who were only a few years older than I was and even many of them the same age as I. It was painful to look at them while they were carried in stretchers from the trains just arriving, one after another. Some were with- out legs, arms ,blinded or deaf. Some of them had been ripped apart so badly, that it was excruciating to see them and listen to their moans .They were all so young!

My co-worker friends and I paid the victims in the hospital regular visits. (Only those who were coherent) We weren't allowed to visit those who were truly in bad shape. .Every Sunday we gathered in the hospital to let them know that we were behind them , giving them our indispensable smiles of support and a few hour of conversation. They were thrilled to see us and every Sunday, they looked forward for that visit, eager to see us again. They always greeted us with great enthusiasm letting us leave with regret. The conversations, jokes and the little laughter helped them cope with themselves to day by day. Their problems and conditions somehow softened. That was the least we could do for their suffering ; a bit of sacrifice that we owed them in return for protecting us. They fought for our

safety, sacrificing their own lives so we tried to at least support them in order that everyone in the country recognize their dedication.

But during the week my co-workers and I worked hard. We were never late and we never complained. This was our everyday life without significant events.

Winter was very long. Snow always fell with layers of it accumulating on top of another. It seemed as if summer would never come. One day my mother and I had an unpleasant experience which occurred to us unexpectedly. It is still in the back of my mind. This episode had a lasting impression on me since it was very distressful. Like every day, dark as can be, on winter-mornings, my mother and I had awakened before day-break, to get ready for work. The snow-fall from overnight had accumulated rapidly this early morning, piling up, creating dunes all over, and covered the streets' gutters as well as entire streets to an unrecognizable stage. The Russian people never took the effort to even shovel their driveways out, and the streets were never plowed. The impression I got from The Russians was that they didn't want to be bothered by anything. They lived a passive life, very uncomplicated. They never made any extra effort to undertake a job which didn't result in pay.

That

morning, my mother and I left our "beds" to wash our faces with cold water from a half frozen pail (we had baths every week in the communal Bania, the bath house). We dressed up in the warmer room (as were sleeping in the unheated entry). We ,

weren't really interested to look through the windows as it was still dark and anyway , the windows were covered thickly with ice-painting and shadowed by long and large icicles. Ready to go, we attempted to open the front door. We were surprised when the door hardly gave way only to a narrow gap. This door lightly ajar allowed us to see what had happened outside on the other side of the door. In the front , there was a big mountain of blown snow , barricading our entry, and further down were snow dunes all over. At that time the heavy snow-fall had changed to a thin yet rapid snow- fall, which descended with amazing speed pushed by the strong wind. It was a blizzard condition. A Russian blizzard could continue for three full days and nights. Waiting for a clearing was helpless. But, we had to go to work! We finally managed to force through the door, putting our feet in the barrage of this snowy mountain , sinking right into it , then paving our way through the yard's deep blanket of snow, to the street. Normally in the winter, walking through the streets wasn't so bad as the snow on the streets was rammed down by walkers. (The shovels were never used). The blizzard was in its highest of intensities this day . When we were already in the open space of the street, severe winds mixed with snow hit us like a volcano. We weren't able to see anything. The snow was heavy. Houses were buried beneath mounds of snow . The streets were completely deserted and covered so thickly with this rapidly falling snow that it was impossible to recognize where the pavement started. Everything was in haze. Only puffs of smoke were hardly visible from the

chimneys, suppressed by the blowing wind. You could barely tell whether or not there was a house on that spot. We could only estimate the actual street. It was only a guess ... " We must go to work!" we commanded ourselves. We tried to advance forging through the snow, recalling how I was previously punished and my mother paid her " duty" to... Both my mother and I were determined to keep going further. But this was unbearable. Usually, the walk to the shop in normal conditions, was as far as a 15 minute brisk march. It seemed like an hour had passed and we still didn't arrive at work. We were glad that, that day we left the house earlier than we usually did. The wind with its vicious fury pushed the snow to the surface, then picked up the snow again but in a twirling motion, tossed and threw it in the air, making the way more difficult and invisible. Not only did the invisibility disturb us but we also couldn't breathe. Since the wind and the snow suffocated us we lost our direction. We weren't able to tell if we were on the street or whether we lost our minds since confusion set in. This circumstance caused us to panic and bump into invisible houses. We went crazy. We lost control of the situation. It was a horrifying experience. We once did we stop and clasp each others' arms and start bitterly sobbing. Since the time for sobbing was considered dangerous we tried to wipe away our tears from our faces with gloves covered with snow, and holding each others' hands, we again attempted to proceed to pave the so-called road. Intuition became our guide to direct us on. In this type of weather condition we couldn't stop to wait for

someone to come .No- one was near us anyway . Nor was there anyone from a distance available. There was no shelter This plain was deserted' empty. All of a Sudden we detected shiny tracks from a sleigh on the surface of fresh new fluff. Maybe by some miracle these tracks weren't covered up yet by the blowing snow. Then again maybe someone's sleigh just shortly drove by us like an invisible ghost and due to the blinding condition they slipped by unnoticed..The two polished imprints which were left gleamed like glass. The remaining markings of the two parallel strips were our only hope to bring us to our destination .These shiny lines became arrows(sort of)pointing us to the way to salvation. We followed them for quite sometime . They had by chance finally led us to familiar grounds, near our plant. It was a wonderful feeling to enter into our shop, brushing off the snow from our clothing and leaving the horror behind us.

That day because the weather grew desperately bad the demand and need for horse blankets increased. Delivery had to be made fast. This was on emergency so the factory's administration decided to retain us in the shop ,forcing us to work till we finished this important task. That meant , if the job wasn't completed we had to work overnight sleeping two nights at the plant. We remained in the shop working intensely for a few days ,with a minimum of relaxation, to accomplish this important job. .In the nights,we spread out on the floor covering ourselves with the horses's blankets, and slept that way. And in the early morning after a small breakfast in the

cafeteria , we ardently attacked our work. There in our cafeteria we also ate our lunches and suppers . After we finished our requirement the plant's administration made a small party for us. We celebrated our accomplishment and the quickest workers were recognized by applauds.

I and my co-workers never missed our Sundays to visit our soldiers. The hospitals were so packed that the wounded were placed in the corridors . Many of them recuperated, with their strong perseverance and rejoined the Army. Some were crippled for life. The shipment of wounded came every day... The constant unloading of the trains with agonized soldiers was terrifying to me...

Spring was cold. The short summer passed by quickly . War still continued. Autumn approached with her rainy days . Those unpaved Russian roads turned to oceans of mud. As far as I know roads in Russia were not paved . Those roads became full of clay . The mud was deep and gluey. Motorized German equipment got stuck in Russian roads with no hope of getting out of them. Their soldiers were disbanded, and they deserted their equipment leaving them in the middle of the deep mess. Sophisticated weapons were stuck to the ground just like flies to glue paper. The Soviet's clumsy, unsophisticated tanks were more reliable , surpassing the more advanced of German tanks . German tanks were more suitable to their own familiar terrain.

The winter of 1944 drew near and it was at this time that the greatest of blows finished the Germans and led to their defeat. The winter was long as always, and its severity seemed endless. The snow, icy frost, and the wind, the storms, and hunger brought many German soldiers to capitulation. Many were captured and many were killed, and many still fought to their last dying breath "in the name of their Chancellor the monster-Hitler". Many of them died from starvation and frost in this strange country not even having to fight in a battle whatsoever. Mother Russia proved to the world for a second time, that no-one other than the Russian people could only and would only withstand so courageously and so bravely; the hunger, and its winters' severity. Napoleon was conquered by it also, now...so were the Germans conquered by the same environmental forces. The Germans were pushed more and more away from the occupied Russian territories, constantly suffering defeats. The Russian people were accustomed to their harsh lives and acclimated to their weather as well. They hardened tough as iron. Every inconvenience was a normal part of their life. Everything was so natural to them. They ignored unpaved roads not complaining of walking on thick layers of snow and ice. They were used to every kind of trouble, any difficult circumstance. Nothing was more important in their entire lives than food and warm clothing—and alcohol. The Russian's were a very patriotic people. Their goal in essence was to smash the German forces and to get revenge for that which they did to their

country- man. Can you blame them?...

The bombastic triumphant news coming over the loud speakers ,of the nearly reached victory gave us strength to survive. I already became accustomed to an entirely different life style and started to forget my past other life.The previous life of having lived in Poland didn't exist for me anymore and wasn't a reality for me either. I pushed away the memory of my childhood many times.It was too far, too long ago...This was now another life ,another country , another people...

One day,when my mother walked on an icy street she fell and slipped badly breaking her arm. She was unable to work in the shop anymore . Her arm was put in a cast for a long time. After the cast was removed she still constantly complained of her pain in her arm and due to that, she was permanently discharged from her work. Overlooking the difficulty of our standard of living ,and my obligation to my landlady as; washing the floors and going to fetch the water from the nearest pump,a few blocks away, I still looked at my life very optimistically.In the Summer everything was bearable ,but in the winter time my walks to the pump in the harsh ,frosty windy days without stockings , wearing only a padded jacket and padded boots, under my summer ,short, percale dress, my legs darkened to purple from the cold. The frost was so strong that to reach the communal pump, to pump water itself, was difficult as it would spill water around it and would turn into a mountain of solid ice.So , to place big pails under a pump which was also covered with a layer of ice was not fun at

all. When I walked on the way home with these big pails attached to the yolk (I was already an expert), the water's surface froze in the pail within a short time. But I was bigger and stronger and already used to harsh labor so I could withstand the difficulty. I became a Russian girl. I started adapting myself to the Russian life. I read books, and went to dances (only if someone lend me nicer boots) working and making new friends. I also visited my fellow Polish country-men for sentimental reasons. Somehow it was keeping me closer to my own hometown without realising I probably was still very sentimental when it came to my Polish country. I superficially pushed away my memories.) Most of the refugees managed better than my mother and I. The majority of them were tradesman. As of that their situation was a bit better. They didn't suffer hunger to the degree as we did. Tradesman were always in demand in villages and small towns. Privately, Russians paid them for their services with victuals (mostly with their own produce). Some of our country people were concerned with our state of living, deploring our existence and they would never let me go home hungry. They always have for me hot sup. They advised that next time to bring my mother to discuss this matter. The next I visit with my mother. Due to the mishap of my mother's broken arm and being that she was disabled, our kind advisors suggested that the disability was a good opportunity to do something constructive to ameliorate our miserable existence. As of that we realized that we have to do something. They advised us that, the wisest thing to do was to go to Gorki. Near the

train station we would notice an enormous flea market. There we would find merchants selling sunflower seeds. They told us to buy a burlap bag of it and to then bring it to Bogorodsk to sell by a glassful of this seeds on the black market. They told us that we could make a good profit selling these seeds which are the only affordable snack Russians enjoyed. Although it is illegal to do this they said, they won't put you in jail for this. If they do catch you, the only thing that they will do to you is confiscate your merchandise and your money. In this time of war they too are looking for extra income. We will lend you the money for your first burlap bag of seeds, and from your profit you will be able to pay us back the money borrow and with the difference, you will be capable to pay your own first merchandise." It was worth putting it to a test. To starve and wait at someone's mercy was too painful, and we were very dejected, feeling horrible and at the same time we were humble. My mother was ready to do anything. She decided to take the first step towards our success.

We took our friends' advice and we went to Gorki. The flee-market was exactly as described near the station. The market itself surpassed our imagination. It was like an enormous sea consisting of living human beings; rustling around, roaring and buzzing with all kinds of noises. The diversity and the number of merchandise greatly surprised us, having experienced "Russian depression". The entire place sounded like a madhouse. People were calling out trying to lure each other to buy, rudely intruding, cursing or barging in. I never ever saw such a market this size. There they sold; from bric-a-brac, to overcoats, suits, dresses, furs, and mostly ^{plundered} secondhand items. ^{from} Clothes mostly came from overseas sent in by Russian soldiers for their families. These were mostly stolen from the countries they plundered. There was also a diversity of food and even life stock, like; poultry, goats, pigs or a lean cow and... name it.-It was there. You even could buy real jewels or, old gold Russian coins that were concealed for along time by someone. For the first time I saw in the starving Soviet Union such a diversity and so many people in the market...And so many things to sell! To my own surprise there wasn't any police hunting around or preying on the "speculators"(something so usual and so familiar and petrifying). The merchandise was spread out on the ground like it is in every market. There was everything for everyone's needs; from samovars (a Russian tea urn) to petty items. Peddlers came running frequently from

every corner of the market with a hot pot of coffee, calling out loudly to the chilled customers and announcing to them advertising the availability of the pot of coffee by calling; Goriachaia koffee! Goriachia! Goriachia koffee! " Hot coffee! Hot coffee! " . Even the ice cream stands tantalized the mob . They shouted out ; "Ice cream! Marojnyie! Marojnyie!" Looking at this enormous market I got the impression that everything moved about like a disturbed beehive, intruded by outsiders. It was quite an experience cutting through this humongous crowd. Bouncing between people, trying to pass them, bobbing in and out and springing about, my mother and I finally pushed our way through this swarming crowd to find the spot where the merchants sold the sunflower seeds. After bargaining, we bought our first supply of seeds and returned to town by train proud of our accomplished achievement . After this experience, my mother became a professional "speculator" traveling back and forth; selling and buying. We were no more hungry and my mother had already in a short time accumulated additional fund. My stomach was finally satisfied, but...still a strange cloud hung over my head. I was troubled...Young, and being in the environment imbued with Communistic ideology, I was easily influenced by their doctrine. I was so brainwashed, that in my own mind my mother's activity started to disturb me. Deep in my mind I knew, that in this proletarian country many things were considered wrong, which to the contrary, were highly acceptable in capitalistic countries, nevertheless, my mind took a narrow view being exposed to another world; the Soviet Union. I

(as the other people in the Soviet Union) was cut off completely from the outside politics and became saturated with the media of Communistic propaganda, which implemented in me to hate Capitalistic regimes. After all, I was surrounded and exposed mostly to native Russians. I was very uncomfortable with my mother's way of earning a living. Involuntary I disparaged it, in spite of my menacing hunger. I hated that and even myself, feeling dirty and worthless. In my own mind, my mother committed a crime of "illegal speculation". What a horror! My mother a speculator! As much as I was feeling uncomfortable, every day at lunch I managed nevertheless to obtain extra hot soup from the cafeteria for my mother. I would run to the market, carrying it in a special container to keep it warm for her, at least for a short time. After all, she was my mother! Staying in the market for those long hours she became stiff and numb from the chill of the air. The love for my mother overpowered my "noble thinking". Each time I'd come to the market clandestinely, afraid that someone would see me and I would be scorned by others.

One day I was called to the director's office. This It was an unusual occurrence and that made me nervous.. I didn't do anything wrong, nor did I do anything good, so I couldn't guess as to why I was told to see the director. I knocked on the door and heard him answer "yes." I entered into his office. Smiling, ceremoniously at me he told me that he had in mind to assign me to a new job as a merchandise supplier for our shop. (The whole structure of a communistic commercial regimes is very different from those of capitalistic countries .)" It would be something like a salesperson, but not exactly," that you are presently doing. I couldn't believe what I heard at first and I asked him to repeat it. He caught my puzzled expression on my face which probably was not too very controlled by me. "Oh you look so... so very dumfounded .You appear to be very frightened !" He looked at me laughing. " I have a feeling that you underestimate yourself. It is not as complicated as you think it is. It is a matter of routine , involving only some traveling and a personal contact with a buyer. Your only duty will be to persuade the buyer that we need shipment of material immediately to our factory It is not more difficult than any other task " Uncertain that this job was right for my age , I tried to persuade him, " I really don't have any experience in this and I don't think that I deserve this kind of a job" I responded. I was frightened to say, no . He said, "Well, maybe it will work. You have to try. I am convinced that you will do

alright. You have the personality and that is helpful" . At that moment ,I started to scrutinize myself and I couldn't see what he mind; "my personality?." What I could only hear is that he finished with a statement," It's worth putting it to a test . You will be paid much more and will receive an extra bonus . That will do you good.The job is more interesting -than of sewing." Standing in the front of the director's desk I meditated and bargained with myself, considering,supposing ,thinking... to accept or not to accept .Can I say no? Why me? I was too confused and too timid to ask.On one hand that was a privilege, on the other hand ... He looked at me cheerfully , laughing. His look broke my confidence and at the end of our conversation I spat out quickly,"I will try on one condition , that I will not be obligated to do it -that I can change my mind, and because of this that I will not be arrested!" He stood up telling me simultaneously shaking my hand , " Good luck, I promise You." So the day came that I took a train, ignited with adventure and excitement for this new opportunity to go to a town (I can't recall its the name) where there was a big textile factory.

This was already the beginning of spring of 1945.It was still winter and the snow still fell with big fluffy flakes on the unmelted surroundings.It was quite cold.Since I arrived too late to be officially received in the office , the factory person in charge accommodated me with their hotel for the night. The factory "hotel" was nothing else but a big room full of beds. The room was designated for representatives from other states

in case the person had to stay overnight. There were only two rooms .One for women and the other for men. In the early morning I was asked to appear at the buyers' office. The officer greeted me disrespectfully, not paying any attention to me , and kept his eyes on a pile of paper stacked on his desk. Ignoring my presence, he didn't even force himself to look at me. Then he mumbled out his justification ; his priority was to supply the merchandise somewhere else , therefore... he couldn't supply our plant for this coming month. Listening to his cold explanation I felt my tears coming to my eyes. I was embarrassed to return to our shop with nothing accomplished , and furthermore to be so humiliated by being ignored . I couldn't even see how I could not start up a conversation with him. To camouflage my defeat and realizing that I could achieve anything, I started to raise my voice . I actually lost " my game". So with anger, I told him, "It's urgent that we must have the fabric ! We must ship the horse blankets in a rush! This is war my dear citizen!(Incidentally the man was bigger and older than I was and I felt like a fly in comparison to an elephant. And that's' no joke!) The army is depending on us! We must do everything ,even if it's impossible to win the war! " He finally raised his head and glanced at me with curiosity .He opened his mouth and with a strange look on his face ,he started choking with laughter - and that made me even more angry. I could read in to his eyes that he was guessing how old I was .That was even more unbearable and I almost left his office... but he stopped laughing and replied with reverence " You are right. We have

to supply the merchandise for such a crucial matter. You will have it today. I will take care of it myself to be sure that everything is O.K. and in addition to this, you will have our truck, if it is alright with you?" . He extended his hand, warmly shaking mine, wishing me a safe trip back home and added with a big smirk " We will win the war!" I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I actually did it!. Early in the morning my truck was loaded with the merchandise. We started to get ready to go. The truck driver suggested to me, that it would be wise if I sat on top of the load, to watch the merchandise. He warned me certain people lurked on every road; many thieves plundering who looked for the opportunity to grab at anything. Good trained thieves can jump onto a moving truck(especially when roads were bad so many times and due to that trucks would slow down and get stuck in the snow). All the thieves had to do was to jump onto a truck's top and push away the bolts of material off the truck onto the ground and then grab it from the ground and disappear with it. If someone was on top of the load guarding it of course, meaning you, that would intimidate them from stealing the bolts of material. In essence, since I am responsible for the supply of material it was up to me and I decided to heed his advise. I climbed on top of the pile of bolts of material and we meandered towards home. The condition of the road was very bad. Unpaved roads, full of unremoved snow were creating obstructions. It was difficult to drive. Frequently we would emerge out the heaps of snow. Numerous times, we were helped by the passing soldiers

with the aid of the Army trucks, pulling us out of the obstructions so that we could continue the rest of the journey. When we finally arrived at our plant, someone had to remove me from the truck as I was almost frozen stiff. Of course, my director was extremely pleased of my accomplishment and rewarded me with a few yards of cheesecloth which my mother later had traded in for food.

The Germans were already pushed out of Russia . Their army was running about like a bevy of disorganized herd of rams leaving behind them shock ,disbelief and astonishing amount of destruction as well as horror.At that time, the goal of every nation which fought the common enemy , only concentrated on smashing them completely. Their inhumane acts of terror which remained was left as their marks was beyond peoples' imaginations... This ignited in everyone the only passionate desire; to crush them to the very end and wipe them off from the surface of the world. The hate toward the Germans rose up from the tremendous sorrow of human tragedy committed against the Russian people and were caused by these Germans.This hate turned into an obsession... almost consuming...

Now,it was already late spring of 1945 ,and the snow almost melted completely when my director insisted that I should go again to the textile factory for additional material. "Now that spring was here" he said " it will be easy for you and more pleasant of a journey as the weather this time is unlike that of the winter.It will also be an advantage that you will travel back with the train. The material you will ship over will be by railroad only." It sounded perfect. I accepted the proposal with no hesitation. So, I went. The place was familiar as was the atmosphere . The buyer recognized me and welcomed me with a broad grin, looking happily to see me as if we were long time friends. He joked about my young age, applauding arduously my

effort and telling me that I was his youngest client in his business history he ever dealt with. Amused with my determination he accepted my order promptly and on my way to the door ,he wished me good day, teasing me , saying " You see, we are winning! The Germans are running away!" Ready to leave the town I headed towards the train station cheerful and delighted of my achievement and thrilled in my accomplishment which in my future would apparently lead to my promotion, so I thought.The day seemed so beautiful that everything put forth in front of me put me in a wonderful mood. This day was probably the warmest day in the season. The trees already were covered with delicate, fully developed leaves, glimmering in the sun with a fine light green crown covering the gigantic trees with but that just popped out overnight. All this greenery ,not yet covered by the station's dust ,smelled fresh and inviting. The surroundings at the station was in its natural state of beauty. The warm air attracted me to go out doors.The waiting room was unpleasantly dark and vacant. It was a sort of a chilly atmosphere. The time of my departure entrapped me to remain in that place for long hours .In such weather it would be silly to stay in this dark, unpleasant hall so,I decided to step out and enjoy this early burst of warmth . Outside ,in the back of the station , parallel to the building wall was a bench, and it was there that I decided to sit and enjoy the rest of the day, taking advantage of the warm golden ,hot caressing sun.After such a long winter I was delighted to sunbathe in solitude , enjoying my privacy in a

quiet place as that. The sun, the slight puff of wind was like therapy to my soul. The sensation of smelling the fresh, air with its saturated fresh scent blowing about, in almost instant -end the surrounding greenery filled me up with a pleasant mood and during in that time the whole world seemed less ugly to me ... Sitting and musing under the sun with my eyes closed, proud of fulfilling the task and having it well done, I didn't mind to even wait the whole day for the train to arrive. Unexpectedly, I felt a movement that someone sat beside me on this bench. As I opened up my eyes and turned my face to the intruder, I saw a man much older than I was. His features were familiar to me. I recognized him as he sometimes passed by me in the "hotel" amongst the others. "Hi" he greeted me with a smile. It was a real annoyance to me to have company at this time. I wasn't in a mood for it. I was pleased to be by myself. It was so nice for a change to be alone. Then, of the other hand.... It was still so many hours till the train would arrive (only one train per day) that I decided become more sociable. "I will shorten my waiting time thinking to myself by chatting with him. So, we spoke and touched on many subjects regarding our town and our work. The conversation was trivial but at least time passed by. Sitting on the bench for such a prolonged period started to agitate us and we decided to take a brief walk. The scenery was so untroubled and relaxing that we were delighted to stroll while we talked. The topic of our conversation changed. We conversed about the war, its tormenting time, and the achievement and perspective of the country's

future. The dialogue and polemics was so heated that I overlooked how far we had traveled. We reached quite a distance from the station. We already passed area an that was covered with green crabgrass followed by some tall feral shrubs, that made an attractive background passing further on a flat piece of greenery covered by crabgrass. Although no human hands beautified this area of the station's lot, its entire look was splendid especially after so much snow. Whatever it grew - was wild, with succulent, but lush greenery, not yet overgrown since spring in the heart of Russia since it started late. As I turned around in the direction of the station I was faced with an unhappy reaction from my companion. Nevertheless, the distance from the station made me feel uncomfortable and I ignored his reaction and started back. He hesitated at first, but after a split of second, reluctantly, followed me. Going back, we approached the previous shrubs we passed. There my companion nonchalantly proposed to take a break and relax on this piece of grass as we still had lots of time to kill, for our disposition. Our train should arrive not earlier than two hours. It was just a perfect spot to repose. We chatted and joked for this time. Why not? My companion reached for his briefcase, from which he pulled out some sandwiches. He insisted that I eat with him. Then he reached for his bottle of vodka. He attempted to tender me a small glass, but I refused. Mad at my refusal, he therefore gulped it himself. One gulp, followed another and he started to become tipsy. I started to be very uncomfortable and commenced to be uneasy, thinking of how to get

out of this unpleasant situation. I was alarmed and looked at him with horror. When he started up again he insisted anew and he suddenly started to make a pass at me - I was in a state of trepidation. In a flash, my mind told me; "I had to break away! I must think quickly to not show my fear". Suppressing my panic I pretended that I had to stand up for a few minutes to stretch my back. I noticed that no-one was around us to hear me if I were in danger. The distance from the station was at length. My companion looked completely drunk and I wasn't sure any more of my safety. Without any further thinking I grabbed my bundle and started to run as fast as I could. The alcohol made him light headed so he could suspect my wild urgency to depart. He was taken by surprise when I unpredictably in my action started to run as swiftly as I could without pausing for breath, not even giving him a chance to pursue me. I heard him calling out to me as he was able to overtake my steps and he was right behind me. I realized at that time, that I hadn't a second to lose. I ran indefatigably and when I reached the station I realized that he almost caught me but what held him back was his unstable stance due to the ingestion of alcohol. Finally, I reached the waiting room and grabbed the first bench I saw with my last breath. I sat there for a long time unable to regain my composure. I was finally safe and so he took off. The next day after returning to town I resigned from my "career." I understood the consequences that for a young girl to be alone is very dangerous. Beside that, finally... after so many years finally the war was over. Poland was liberated! What a joy it

was then for everyone! We sobbed and hugged each other like children. Between my mother and I there were tears of confusion . It was hard to believe that after so many years everyone was liberated from the Nazis. We survived ! The return to our homeland was indeed real! Real?... That we shall see!...

UNDERTAKING

chapter 37

My mother at any price planned for a long time to leave the Soviet Union and to return to her homeland. But how?.. We all knew that behind the Iron Curtain we couldn't be our own person an "owner of self will". The government controlled everything. We were all terrorized by them. To them - (all of us) we were but robots, without any rights whatsoever and weren't allowed to have wishes or even undertake certain actions of\on our own. All decisions were left up to the "higher domain". But our government ignored us. The bureaucracy procrastinated and maybe so on purpose... Our urgent desire was to put an end to the unfulfilled promises so that we'd be able to return to our homes. It was already the winter of 1945. Although we hadn't any perspective in connection to our situation, my mother still insisted that we return back to Poland our homeland. She accumulated a substantial sum of money and that made her feel powerful in her conviction and in her decision. In my opinion her determination was absurd and could have landed us into big trouble. "Mother! I don't believe that we can even go so far as Moscow!" I constantly badgered her. But she unmoved, fiercely answered me the same; "Oh dear, you never experienced money making miracles," and always adding the comment to our conversation; "If I have to lose my entire hard earned assets to

forge ahead and risk this , I will do it to satisfy my conscience, and will do everything which is possible. To stay one day longer in the Soviet Union is adding another nail to our coffin . I would rather act , then sit and wait for another "maybe" . I really don't trust this government. Besides, if father is alive, he will be exempt from prison since foreigners have been promised (every political prisoner from Poland) to be set free on the basis of the amnesty which is pending . I am certain that father will strive to return there also , of course if he is still alive." I was very skeptical of my mother's venture. Nevertheless my mother started the preparation for our journey. The main thing in her mind was to be well dressed as she described " in elegant attire". The Russian style(babushka style) was uncommon in Poland. She didn't want to return home in rags, so mother went frantic with her preparation. She managed the impossible. The care packages of used clothes from America which we received from time to time from the administration of Anderson's Army, was not worn by us since they weren't suitable for the climate we were in, as well as improper for the Soviet society' environment. Mostly the goods we received were from beautiful velour or fine wools. It didn't take much time for my mother to find a dressmaker from Poland which could transform American's goods into elegant dresses. She also managed to order my first bra through a professional bra- maker, also an emigrant of Poland .As she ordered it giggling she told me, that at eighteen it is about time to have such a necessity even though the government does

not agree with her... After this preparation we went to Gorki. This time our own visit to the flea-market wasn't to buy sunflower seeds, but for our own personal reason. Each time I visited Gorki's flea-market I was dazed by the huge activities and the multitude of people there. The sound of loud shouting peddlers came from everywhere ; bargaining, swearing and speaking. All this was transformed into a loud roar. We were like a small drop of water in a big bucket and our eyes wandered about. People sold everything. Many sold their only piece of bread, coffee or sugar from their personal allotments. Some were professional peddlers(of course illegal) and some still sold European plunders or American goods. There were also many pick pockets circulating as well as thefts. We had to buy lots of necessary items ,including for me, a real fur coat a "trophy" from Austria. On the train,leaving with all the purchase we made I still questioned the impetuous adventure. "Ma, I still can't understand how we can travel without tickets? The whole preparation seemed ridiculous to me as well ". " You are incorrigible , just trust me. I told you that money is the key to every door?" She answered with a big mysterious smile. When our preparation was finished, after few more days my mother brought home two tickets to Moscow.I looked at her in disbelief."Mother, how did you do that"? "Don't ask too many questions it isn't healthy" she grinned.

After a few days had passed we took the train to Gorki and from there we changed lines which took us directly to Moscow. Listening to the familiar rhythm of the train's wheels clattering, I watched the unchangeable bleak view flashing through my window for quite some time. We passed homes then fields then large forests. And again and again... It was very dull as everything was covered by a heavy layer of snow. It was already late November. I was vehemently in repugnance to the sight I was taking in. "Snow! Snow! How I detest you!", recalling my past experiences and misfortune in Russia but then my thoughts changed quickly to more pleasant memories of my childhood. I remembered how I used to wait for each winter impatiently for the first snowfall to arrive so that I could go sledding with my friends. When the Prosna River which flew through Kalisz froze, I would ice skate to the music of classical waltzes or, be with a bunch of my schoolmates in the park making a snowman or - simply having snowball fights. But that was so long ago! When had my childhood stopped?... I think that it was on the River Bug or even earlier; in the beginning when of the Germans invaded us. That was when I grew up in a day... Now I am returning home. I am 18 years old, fully grown up, looking beautiful and youthful but at the same time feeling already so old... If?!... I thought, If we successfully reach Kalisz, would I be recognized by the people I used to know? Will I recognize my classmates and my friends? Everyone by now must be so grown up and changed! ... I mused. The train speeding

with a rhythmic sound like music to my ears, constantly sang out ;" near home. near home, near home". And I continued to think. Yes...they certainly have changed! But the self evident question and answers were like a knife piercing my troubled heart.Have they really?... Who is left anyway after this war? I am so scared!^{scared to face the possibility} I started to tremble. A cold sweat developed on my forehead . I reflected upon the so many horror stories I had heard told by wounded soldiers during my visits with them in the hospitals. They told me that the German's gassed innocent people alive.How the women, men, children... and even infants were packed into the gas chambers like sardines in tin-boxes. That was only one of the horrors.They described to me how the Germans terrorized Jews, under heavy guards with arms and dogs and forced these Jews to dig long and deep ditches,and made them strip off their clothes and were ordered to stand by this horrendous act of watching others being killed off, (all the while knowing they were next) by standing alongside of these ditches dug up by them and for them and to further wait for their turn to also be shot point blank in the same manner of; one by one through their heads which made these innocent victims tumble into these pits so that the German soldiers didn't even have to toss the carcasses into the holes. They were piled one on top of another as refuse.Then the Russians were forced to cover these pits up.

The Russians also in exceedingly great numbers were tortured barbarously and killed or were hanged.I heard how the Germans shot people like rabbits for no reason whatsoever.They were so

blood thirsty that killing was nothing but a pleasant sport to them. They thought nothing of it..They told me so many stories that I was unable to understand it all or even believe it. Even thinking about it made me shrivel up and shake with an atrocious boggling repugnance and I tried not to think about it . Maybe it wasn't all true? I asked myself.However, I already experienced some of the German's cruelty! Nevertheless, it was difficult to believe the magnified horror...Then my thoughts switched thinking about my bosom friend Ala. Oh, I have so much to tell her! I miss her so much! She must now be a young lady. Did she cut her hair? She used to have such long beautiful and thick chestnut braids. Is she alive?... At that moment I opened up my eyes as they were full of tears which started to run down my face. I turned away toward the window to hide my emotion from my mother. I knew that she worried about her whole family. Looking at the view through the window view I could only see unmelted snow lying on the plains, on the trees, and on roof tops. My thoughts like electricity kept switching on and off and I was back recalling my hunger, my complete poverty , homely and humiliated moments and...my hard labor...The war was over .I was going home. But what I experienced during the time of the war will stay with me forever , for the rest of my life .But... I was thankful that I was alive. The war was over . Would there be a celebration? ... Again I shook with repugnance and again I closed my eyes but this time I fell asleep lulled by the melodic rhythm of the train's wheels.Only when we were near Moscow was I awaked by

my mother's nudge and statement " We will soon arrive in
Moscow! Wake up! You'll miss the view!".

"Moscow! Moscow! Terminal! Moscow! Step out please! This is a term-in-al!... Moscow! Like a puffed up turkey, the conductor proudly announced the train's arrival entering Moscow's platform. A puff, a rattle of detained wheels ...then the opening of the doors. My mother and I stepped out from the crammed train, exited, joining the rushing and pushing crowd carrying bundles, baskets, suitcases to the station's hall with many accompanied by children or being only single individuals . We were almost pulled by the flow of this rushing flock ,being urged in that direction as one unit. At the entry we stopped-very surprised.. Yes, this city of Moscow was a metropolitan city but seeing so many stations in the past, in such poor conditions or in unpleasant ones, that our first impression of this one overwhelmed us. I was so impressed to see for the first time in my life something that looked to me almost unreal. This Moscow station didn't resemble any of the other stations I previously visited. It was in comparison to the others , huge! The sparkling white ceiling was high and arched under a great amount of bright lights. In the middle of the hall was an opening with wide polished stairs made from dark rose marble ,leading down to the metro . Many people with their baggage gathered around this open entrance, and also scattered through the entire hall. We chose as our first step, just to hang around the station where a big crowd awaited with their

baggages. We looked around with curiosity and excitement admiring such grandiose place. However, seeing something new and unfamiliar to me, automatically intensified my worry. I was almost ready to ask my mother what we would do next on her agenda, but I resisted asking. I didn't want to be a nuisance to her and since I was always so critical of her effort, it seemed to me that I looked so very immature I certainly knew that she herself didn't know what the next step would be. Somehow, she noticed my expression and confused as I was, to calm me down, abashed, she told me; "Let's us look around and become more familiar with this beautiful Moscow hall". Then shortly she added; "We have to pray for luck." After having said so she then looked all round, lost in uncertainty. I was in anguish... Does she know what we are doing? Is this it the right way to do it? I hope that we are not going to get into trouble! I posed many burning questions to myself worrying and at the sometime observed the large crowds. Over here people were better dressed, some very good. (probably from the other countries or were important figures) The atmosphere was calmer, different in every aspect. As we got accustomed with our surroundings, my mother and I started to discuss our uncertain situation. We always conversed among ourselves in Polish even if our Russian was perfect and at that time since it was convenient, to keep it undisclosed from someone else. As we chatted, a small group of some individuals stood by, with a detectable interest, gaping at us. They represented a group of three men and one young women. Since they stood near us, it was close enough to catch

some of our words from our conversation and it was obvious that they were listening in on us and discretely scrutinized us. Shortly one from the group a young individual approached us. He kindly excused himself for his intrusion, speaking in Polish; "I am sorry but I overheard your conversation in Polish. Forgive me that I am curious . I permitted myself to invade your privacy. You see, we are all from Poland and understand that you are too. We would like to satisfy our curiosity. We wonder from what part of Poland do you come from?. Please forgive this intrusion. Every runaway is inquisitive to meet each other". From that point we began a long conversation and the whole group joined in with us. Of course everyone of us was eager to know from what part of Poland each of us came from . Everyone of us had a different story to tell. We also told them in summary our own story. At the end of the conversation we confided in them that we were going to leave the Soviet Union on our own." But now we had a dilemma..." My mother confided " as we didn't know how to return to Poland . Without a connection whatsoever, we were lost. "We, all of us are going to Poland also, on our own," He replied " but we had managed to get a permit and tickets to Lwow legally .(We won't go into how we got it) As for Lwow, it's as of now under Soviet domain. It is the best choice to go there..There is a legal organization that will provide you a paid permit(of course the first priority is the extra pay under the table) to pass through the Russian frontier. This gain of a permit will allow you to cross from Lwow(The Soviet frontier)into Poland . That, we don't have either. This

procedure sometimes takes a few weeks (a waiting period) , because a great deal of people constantly flooding into this city for the same reason as ours. " That was the first information we ever received . I was shocked and elated, but still uncertain. " How did you get so much information and we were so ignorant about this operation ?" I said . The group acknowledged us with humor "Because you have lived in a Hick-town . What you did on your own was very courageous and you merit applause" . My mother answered, "everything sounded so easy obviously. You don't have the same problem facing you ,as you are going legally to Lwow. But how can we reach Lwow?" my mother asked nervously . Evidently you need luck" they almost simultaneously answered us," looking at us with admiration and with a shadow of worry in their statement. " But don't you worry. In Moscow everything is possible. Many times for some reason or another the ticket owner, at the last minutes often gets into an obstacle.The data on the ticket can't be changed .They will be unable to use the ticket the following days .Knowing that there are people like you who look for such an opportunity to get these tickets , they sell them so they can make a large profit.(Some people just make " big money " this way .) We will carefully watch for such an opportunity hoping that we can spot them". As our animated conversation continued, a very handsome , distinguished man , elegantly dressed in a European navy blue coat, attracted our attention. No doubt that he was our latest past president at Gorki at Anderson, Polish Army committee. "Mister Novak!" my mother burst

out with surprise and emotion. Mister Novak stopped and looked in our direction. The bright smile appeared on his face. He stood there for a second and quickly approached us no less surprised as we were."Well! Well! Well! Who is here! Mrs. Laszczewki and her daughter! Unbelievable! " He shook his hands with us still in disbelief. We told him that we were going on our own to Poland, constantly interrupting each other to tell him in a most precise way. When we got our story out ,he couldn't hold back his feelings any more and burst out with a long heartfelt laughter,then calming down looked at us with a strange and serious look " Well,well, you really have a miracle as I have two tickets for you. I couldn't believe the coincidence myself. I recently married a daughter of one of the high rank dignitaries in the Kremlin. We have chosen to travel by air instead of train as my wife is pregnant.I already bought the two tickets . It just so happens that I decide to sell them..... and that's why I am here. I am so glad that you are the ones ,that my tickets could be a big help to." At fist we were numbed by this incredulous statement ,then flabbergasted and then in disbelief that this could actually happen to us and in only in a matter of a split short moment of time. We didn't know how to thank Mr. Novak.It must have been a miracle! Our happiness was indescribable... Everything happened so fast that our emotions paralyzed us. The money wasn't a problem. My mother paid a large amount for the tickets but it was well worth it for us, every ruble. Mr. Novak wished us good luck and good traveling.He left the hall.

Our new friends turned to us overwhelmed by such a quick and wonderful opportunity ,completely sincere and happy for us. They couldn't stop talking about the event which just took place. But , it is frequently a small cloud on a pure blue sky covering the most dazzling sunshine...So was our happiness. The most important were the tickets but we needed a permit ... Without it we would also have a problem ... and was unobtainable whatsoever. Our friends cheered us up, as they could, themselves uneasy and unsure of their reassurance to us. They said , " If you manage getting on board on to the train's compartment ,you can always play that you lost the permit. Most importantly is, that you do have the tickets. It is an old trick to say that the permit is lost ,but sometimes, you can get by without it. It works, now and then and if the conductor is a gentleman or,... you have to bribe him". We knew that one thing the bribe.They avoided mentioning that in this case, they will simply remove us from the train and...they'd be a possibility that we would face consequences.

And now, as we had a long time to wait for the designated train ,our new friends insisted , it would be nice to join them to have at least, get a glimpse of Moscow. "It will be unforgivable to not see the Kremlin!" they insisted.My mother volunteered to watch everyone's baggages as she was in the heavenly disposition to possess at least the tickets in a such short time.

We went to the metro to explore Moscow . The large shinny stairs led to the underground train. The walls as the stairs of the subway, were made of rose

, polished marble. The bright lights of crystal fixtures gleamed and multiplied this reflection of the polished to perfection marble. The big murals of Lenin and the revolution exposed on the walls, were gigantic and looked almost real. After long years of my vagabondage through the uncivilized parts of Russia I was enchanted. The contrast was impressive and shocking. The images on the wall with Lenin was magnificent. I was speechless looking with my hungry eyes and afraid to lose this memorable image, wishing that we will have more time to stay and enjoy this not every day beauty. The subway's couches were nice too. They were modern and spacious. Everything was clean, contrary to Russian culture. The group said, "Hurry, stop staring we don't have to much time! To make you feel better we will buy you some cake, but hurry"! My friends pressed me. They bought me a real torte cake! A torte cake! Can you believe it? A torte cake in the Soviet Union! No, you can't understand that!... After hunger and misery a torte cake...If Marie Antoinette could see me now, she would probably be very happy...

We arrived at Red Army Square. The Kremlin faced us from a distance. We stopped for sometime. The sky was grey so was the walls of the Kremlin. We couldn't take the liberty to explore and be closer but from afar. I could see the red stars on the top of the Kremlin and from the other side could see the golden domes of the churches. Our time was limited. We returned in a hurry to the train station.

It was shortly that the train to LWOV was announced by the station's speaker that it was ready to be boarded ,and was now waiting on the platform. People rushed inside to take their places. We had to say our goodbys to our new acquaintances and walked to the train in a hurry to gain the extra time,which was so very important to us. The last advice offered by our friends was, "Try entering into any coach if you can do it! Use your imagination. We will look for you!" ... Then they wished us lots of luck. "Do we need luck... ?!!!" The coach's doors compressed with eager people entering were not promising at all. Now, we were on our own! Which separate to choose? Which one of these , will be lucky for us ? Every door was so surrounded with crowds that it was a difficult decision to choose which one we should join. Time had run out. We had to act very quickly .We stood on the platform only for a short time observing everything for our own strategy. Suddenly my mother pulled my sleeve and pushed me slightly toward a coach door, surrounded by only many military men . I didn't want to physically resist her as every gesture could be suspicious to someone, but in defense I could only say back to my mother's indication with strained words through my teeth ."What for? Why? We can't go there, this is a military coach" "Just trust me , we have to try as we have nothing to lose. Men are softies when it comes to the opposite sex " she replied.

As we approached the entrance door, crowded with army

men, impossible even for a pin to go through, instantaneously they made a way for us ,letting us pass respectively and a moments later ,we were inside the coach.I wasn't use to such a gallant treatment. It was like magic...I felt like I was somebody else. They might have taken us for an officer's family ... or simply they melted to see a young girl well dressed? The important matter was ,that we were finally inside the wagon. But we were still uncertain of the very possible consequences of our action. " Ma, I said,I still think that we are in the wrong coach. I am scared. This coach looks like it's designated only for military people!.What would they say if they find out that we don't belong over here?." "Stop worrying! If something turns out wrong.... then we shall worry" she replied .

We passed a few pullman's compartments and stopped . My mother drew doors open to the compartment . There, at the window was sitting already a high rank officer,a young middle aged major in his thirty's ,reading a newspaper ." Oh, I am so sorry to disturb you" said my mother retreating ,but the officer almost ready to stand up, invited us inside in a friendly manner, " Not at all " he replied, " you are not disturbing me , please come in, contrary I assure you I request",he smiled. It will be a pleasure to have two such lovely ladies for company." My mother pretended as if she was backing up , mumbling: "we don't want to interfere with your privacy". It looked like everything worked out well for my mother as he repeated his invitation. "Oh, please don't go away, I insist " he said as he quickly

rose off from the bench , taking the baggage from my mother and placed it in the over- head space luggage . He was tall, slim, dressed with care in his army uniform full of stars and decorations and his entire appearance was impeccable." Usually, this is my private compartment " laughing he informed us and helped us with our overcoats", he added,I am so frequently crossing the country , going to many places , from one corner of the country to another , that I usually use my time for paperwork while traveling on the trains. I am using this free boring time , working on court cases as I am a military procurer." We almost choked to death. A procurer! My Dear God! Are we in trouble! What if he will discover that we don't have a permit? The guilt of missing proper papers terrified us.Of all people to appear with , the most unexpected at this particular moment in time to show up. ..I felt like we were inside a lion's mouth.

He put away his news- paper and started to chat with us.During the time we talked I became constantly tormented painfully questioning within me "What will happen if he discovers that we furtively left this country? He would probably arrest us! They will send us to Siberia! We will never be able to comeback to Poland!" But in spite of my anxiety the conversation was cordial and smooth. I could hear the last locomotive's whistle, and the train started carrying us in the direction to Lwow.I was relieved that the train started to move. " Are you too going to Lwow? " He asked "Yes we are. We are visiting our relatives" replied my mother."

I looked at her with admiration,as she maintained a cold

disposition , brazenly lying to his face ." I was amazed how calm she was and at the same time afraid ,looking at her to see if I could detect on her face something stirring which could betray us.But no, she was cool as one can be ,and comfortable talking and lying to his face.I admired her cold blood and boldness. "How nice" he smiled " hope that I will see you in Lwow . I will be there , staying for two months or more." He offered us coffee from his thermos(that was luxury)and a few tea cookies.After some time we reached the old Polish frontier. The door suddenly opened up and with a loud, deep baritone voice belonging to a chubby conductor announcing ;" This is border control! Please, everyone present your tickets for control! Border control! Have them ready for presentation!" He entered into our compartment and after checking ours companion's papers , saluted him with a special respect ,then turned to us. My mother didn't lose her head and smiling handed him the two tickets.My heart stopped beating and I imagined how my mother felt at that moment. "Please! I need your permits!" He impatiently insisted "Oh my God!" I was alarmed and petrified." This is it ! Now this will be our fatal moment! We will be sent back!" But my mother being deep in her lies up to her ears.Said "Yes, Yes of course,I completely forgot. I will get it in a minute" Saying that ,she opened her purse up and made belief that she was looking for it very scrupulously. I looked at her with curiosity. She was very nervous and in a short moment she admitted to him in a desperate tone , "I don't know what happened .I can't find it .

Could it be that I packed them in the suitcases?" She made a desperate motion to reach it, but our gallant procurer stopped her, and grabbed her by her wrist and turned angrily to the conductor saying, "Where is your logic? These ladies have the tickets. It is impossible to get tickets without a permit. So what if it just happens that the permit is displaced. After all they are my guests. I am responsible for them, so I think that this is sufficient. I don't want to be bothered by this any more" he finished. The conductor got red and saluted him quickly and retreated out from our compartment excusing himself respectively. My mother looked embarrassed and surprised by this event which surpassed our expectations. Stirred up, she pretended that she was still in the dilemma of the missing permit. "Don't bother with that" said our solicitor.

"No more than a quarter of an hour after checking tickets (the train was detained for sometime for the frontier control) our two Moscow friends showed up in our coach. Seriously considering our safety they came to look after us. When they realized that we were in the private compartment, guests of an important high rank military person they lost their speech. Their eyes got so big and full of expression that, seeing this I almost burst out laughing. They recovered very fast and offered me an apple as that was a pretext to come over. We were aware of their concern but they seeing us safe, neither one of them mentioned it. They understood that any unnecessary questions would arouse suspicion. They got acquainted with our procurer but shortly their conversation got interrupted as the train started to

move very slowly.They rushed to their own coach, promising us that we will see them at the Lwow station. The locomotive notified us with a loud howling the departure of the train. We were safe. We were actually going to Lwow! How sweet it was! Our desperate situation suddenly made us at ease.We began to relax. The frontier was behind us. In that moment everything was in the color of pink. Our conversation with our saviour turned to the subject of our new friends.We told him how we met them back at the Moscow station and about the short escapade to visit the Kremlin.When it was his turn to speak he reached for his wallet and took from it a picture of a young good looking lady, saying " this was my wife"my mother and I almost simultaneously exclaimed with delight " Oh she is beautiful" "Yes", he assented embittered. "Now she is beautiful , but then when I married her she was a coarse peasant. I have transformed her into a lady . Isn't it amazing? " He stopped for a while. It was probably still painful for him to pour his distress out to someone else. Then he continued " She didn't lack money and prestige. Her hairdresser was from abroad and the apartment was luxurious. The metamorphosis turned her head. She left me for someone else" Saying that he quickly changed the subject so we never comeback to it. Looking at the window I noticed winter was still here but the image started to change. We passed by more concentrated populated areas. Time went by fast chatting and after many hours of a monotonous ride the train started to slow down . The last movement of it ,the stop , the squeak of engines ,a jog ,and the conductor announced in Polish and Russian,still

ringing in our ears; Lwow! Lwow ! Proszę wysiadac! Step out!
Lwow! Eto Lwow !

LWOW

Before leaving the train, our charming (by chance) saviour, informed us that he had to pickup his luggage in the Army's baggage- section, and that it would take him only a short time, and as of that ,it would give us a chance to pickup our own baggage.He affirmed us ardently, that his appointed chauffeur undoubtedly will be waiting for him at the front entrance of the station, so he would give us a ride to our relatives too."Please, don't go away ! Wait for me! I will be back as soon as I can be.!" We smiled , assuring him and in the same time praying to God for a inspiration for a possibility to disappear. To us the further contact with the procurer would be very dangerous.We couldn't afford it. The feeling that in a few minutes we would walk out onto the streets of Lwow was like a dream come true , but the situation with this man was very uncomfortable.Even in Lwow , even though we felt almost completely free ,we still were in Soviet hands. This part of Poland was under the Soviet occupation.Although, our saviour helped us (unknowingly) contributing his charm to our successful escape, we couldn't risk having this continuing relationship with him. We were aware that we had to disappear from the procurer! At In same time we felt guilty that we weren't to grateful to him, but we couldn't help it since this situation could endanger our safety. As Lwow was in the hands of the Soviet's , he could easily return us to Russia.Maybe our act was uncivil and rude ,but we couldn't let that intrude

our minds. For us the war wasn't over. To wait for him and admit that we didn't have any relatives in Lwow and as of that would mean ... that we came illegally; it wasn't very wise . Therefore we chose to vanish. But how?! We were the first ones to out of the train . We immediately spotted the claim-baggage area and rushed to get our own baggage , racing in front of everyone. We managed to get ahead of everyone. Regaining our baggage we spotted a narrow ,unnoticed passage almost a unseen lane, which could carry us from the back of the station out into a street. We began to follow it. At it's entry we were stopped by a woman. Assuming that we looked for something, she asked us , "Are you looking for a hotel?" "Yes" replied my mother pleasantly surprised. " If you would like I can rent you a room in my apartment. It will be much cheaper than a hotel", proposed the woman " How much?" Asked my mother looking at me meaningfully . She was only asking , pretending as if the price was important, but in her heart she was happy to have it for any price, to be far away from the station and to lose contact with the procurer. We accepted the woman's offer and the three of us left in a horse-cab. The chance of disappearing was so fortunate that we were full of excitement and were amused with delight, as we rode to our new shelter. Our lodging was only a very small room at the end of the whole apartment. It was really a sordid one . To reach our room, it was necessary to walk through the other rooms, including the kitchen . In our room was only a double bed since it was the only thing that could fit there. But we were content as it was suitable for the time

being .We then found out from the landlady that in the city exists the Repatriation Center to which we were supposed to register at as soon as possible.We received directions to go there and in the early morning we headed to the Center. It was almost the middle of December. The war was over a relatively long time . Lwow was still full of people in transit with refugees who were on their own trying to reach their home of Poland. Poland was at this time under Communism so that facilitated the formality of passing the frontier.The city was old, yet life seemed be more of a western influence . We arrived at the Center .It was a residential house.Inside it was empty with an exception of a few rooms transformed onto offices.The rest of it served to accommodate crowded people, waiting in line for the formality in regards to the legal crossing of the Soviet frontier.The place was crowded. Besides the line there were people clustered around.There, people could meet some familiar or unfamiliar faces(most often the latter one) and had discussions amongst themselves. The line was always long and advanced slowly. We looked for a familiar face , but to our disappointment there wasn't anyone we knew. People told us that it would take some the time to reach the desk. Then when the petition is admitted ,they're would be a waiting period for acceptance and... a signature,needed. A real bureaucracy. The next day was suddenly a pleasant surprise! Our acquaintances who we met in Moscow turned up at the Center.They instantly spotted us, rushed over to greet us with joy and enthusiasm. Laughing, they congratulated us for

matter is that you had achieved to cross the old frontier and now you are in Lwow..." they told us.

After a long day of waiting we all went to a restaurant to celebrate our accomplishment. This time it was a real restaurant, unlike a cafeteria. The atmosphere was so special to me. There were even waiters dressed up like waiters ...and so polite. I had a strange feeling that I lived for many years in the jungle and went back to civilization. It was unreal to me. I was even alarmed when I looked at the silverware nicely displayed on the white tablecloth, on both sides of my dish. At the first occasion, I whispered to my mother "Mom, I feel so embarrassed. I've forgotten how to use a fork and knife, using for so many years only a wooden spoon! Our intimate conversation was interrupted. She had only time for a quick answer, "look at me and follow me" I was stirred up, ashamed and uncomfortable with myself and then I realized that I lost touch completely with the civilized world." Why had I accepted to go to the restaurant in the first place? I asked myself angrily. "

The food was served. I felt like I was lacking grace and was uneasy sitting at the table, almost in tears. I attentively imitated every of my mother's movement as much I could. At the end of dinner I was very relieved. My torture ended.

Every day from early morning we were in the Center attending it like a Holly Shrine. Always pact with new or the same people made it more interesting and time passed by.

Many days passed by when our line had approached very close

Polish folks. At that time they said that he doesn't belong to that group as he is a Jew. The second amnesty was for the Jews but they didn't let him go as his name was pure Polish. So they said that, "Jan Laszczewski can't be a Jew!". Then came the third amnesty; that was for the both. They couldn't hold him any more. He came to Gus Hrustalnyi looking for you. Unfortunately you weren't there. People told him that you ran away in panic from a possible German aggression. When he came to town, he was so fragile and thin. He had weighed only 40 kg. hardly able to walk with crutches. A Russian Jewish family barely a long time acquaintance of his, took him into their home and provided care for him up to this moment, that he could walk again without the crutches and could take care of himself. Now he has an apartment in the same house you used to live in together. He is now active in the community, helping repatriated Poles. I myself asked him to leave with me to Poland., but he refused, insisting that he will still wait for you." We listened to her story bewildered, eating up each word she said, unwilling to interrupt the superb news so pleasant to our ears. We felt that we would burst with joy. The news extremely excited us. "So father is alive! He is waiting for us! So what are we doing over here?" I burst out. We were in ecstasy and stirred by the happy news. "Ma, now what? Father is alive and waiting! We have to go back to Gus Hrustalnyi! I turned to my mother shaking emotionally from the excitement. It was like I had a fever, screaming ebulliently. "We can't do that my dear"... I was in shock, unexpected of such an answer from my

mother." Why? He is there waiting for us! He is alive! Mother , he is waiting for us , do you understand?! " "Yes, I do understand. Don't think that I don't share the same joy as you and I will be glad to do it in normal circumstances ,but they aren't normal. I have a responsibility towards you as I am your mother. Nothing will stop me to take you to Poland and as of the good news I have for that the best remedy. As we know, now that father is alive, and only waiting for us , otherwise ready to go to Poland, we will send him a telegram that we are on our way to Kalisz and we will proceed with our journey as our papers are ready maybe tomorrow. I can't give up such an achievement, which cost us our lives and heavy money. You don't realize how we risked and what the consequences could be... if something would turn out differently. I don't know if we will have this kind of opportunity again! I am dead frightened to go back to the Soviets as over there I will not know what can happen to me tomorrow. " The facts with which mother tried to convince me made a lot of sense. I understand it very well . The reality was so familiar to me.Likewise. I distrusted the Soviet system . With a mixed emotion ,we went to the post office and we sent the telegram to my father.There wasn't nothing more that we could do in this situation, only to pray and wait of that everything would fall into place by itself.We knew that my father would do the impossible to come to us. The goal was to leave the Soviet Union and never comeback! The next day they told us that our paper was ready and that in three days we were to be in possession of the legal document to cross into our

country. When we received it we couldn't believe our own eyes . The truth of the matter was so wonderful and our praise of our accomplishment was so sweet that it was hard to believe. We were going home! It was miraculous and so wonderful and glorious...

Our friends were also granted the same in the next day. We all celebrated that significant result of our achievement and bravery and at the same time said our goodbys to them. The next day we boarded the train to Warsaw.

This time the sound of the locomotive's with whistle and puissant puffing , spraying of the drops of the water everywhere in the air and the train's rhythms was so blissful to my soul it sounded like a song of return.Kalisz! Kalisz my tawn of my youth ! Kalisz my roots! My home! We were so happy that we were safe and our past life and our suffering was behind us.The Germans and the Russians were history. What a dog's life it was! We stopped in Warsaw only to change the train and in the early afternoon we arrived at the Kalisz station . The locomotive with its last puff and the last jolt ,like an act of agony ,stopped with a rattle within her gigantic iron body, pulling and bouncing the following coaches wagons, then forcing them to a complete stop.Momentarily we heard the conductors' announcement; Kalisz! Ka- a-lisz like a faraway echo in our fantasy and like a dream we stepped out onto the platform with palpitating hearts. Kalisz! Kalisz my home! My youth and my illusions! My unfulfilled dreams.I thought I'd never see you again! I survived everything! Now I am back! The same platform, the same station, only without the Germans...So deserted... We were but a small insignificant number of passengers embarked there with a few railway employers meandering here and there. When I left Kalisz, everything seemed to me so big, so impressive,(maybe as I was only a 13 year old) now everything diminished ,and so different from my memoirs.So strange. But the tranquillity at the station disturbed me the most. Everywhere it seemed so deserted; the

platform, the hall and when we went out from the station , outside it was also predominantly , unusually still. Before the war there were long lines of hors-drawn taxis ,dorozhki, waiting near the station for the crowds coming out... Now there was only three of them , in a deplorable stage.The atmosphere was strangely cold like life somehow discontinued. A "Twilight zone" ? A strange chill ran through my spine. I felt that if I looked around a little bit more I would choke with tears but my tears didn't come up. I was numb, unmoved.

We chose a dorozhka. Automatically we climbed into it. We felt we were losing our courage to face up to the upcoming facts. The unknown facts... I felt like an automatic robot which had to perform necessary movements. My gut feelings foreshadow my yearning for my beloved town and already disillusioned me by striking down my first impression. I thought that I would be delighted and joyful to face the town of my youth, instead I was anesthetized and petrified of that, which I didn't know yet ... The lazy, heavy ,old mare without enthusiasm pulled our wagon .(maybe trying to tell us that we were not welcomed back). Clicking with his hoofs on the old pavement made of wooden squares , with his head hanging down ,the horse was only inspired by the coachman's whip to keep trotting .

Kalisz ! We were passing by the same streets which I had known so long ago. Everyone of them was so dear to me .My town , my memory of my childhood.

To the left we passed a school(Repna) in which I don't have

happy memories,(luckily only for a short time only) to the right, was a house which I lived many years before the war. We chose the direction to Krutka street . That was my mother's brother's business, the same brothers which we left behind us in the Warsaw Ghetto. We hoped that they survived. We continued riding. To the left, we passed the Christian cemetery . Nothing changed there-Nothing was disturbed there . Then was the intersection to the left on the side street,where there used to be a long line of Dorozhki(the horse drawn wagon taxis)... they weren't there anymore. The town was strangely almost empty. The few people on the streets had unfamiliar faces.Nothing was familiar. We passed the church also on the left . The same church with the tall grey, cemented walls hiding behind Lilac bushes, where I used to pass every early evening, where all the young Jews and Gentiles were congregated, walking on that path to meet there, their friends or even socialize .We called this path the " Deptak". Then...it was a time when the streets burst with youngsters of different ages and there, light hearted , frivolous laughs and their conversations buzzed with noise.Everyone of them dressed impeccably in school uniforms with different emblems which signified the demographics of the schools. Now... only here and there someone would pass by; the streets almost empty.Besides that ,nothing changed. So far, nothing was added, nothing was demolished, not even the colors had been changed. It seemed as if I never really had abandoned this town.

Yet something had changed.. This something was so icy cold , so

inexplicable that I felt every part of my body stiffen up. Why!? Because the streets were almost empty? Because the vehicles weren't in action as much as they were before? Because none of these people were familiar to me? What had I expected? A miracle?! Yes! Yes! I wanted a miracle! ... But can't you have a miracle any time?

Shortly we turned to the left. We were on Krutka street. Now our emotions grew sky high . Are they there? Are they all there? Maybe someone is missing? Are they ... No they are smart! They were so resourceful and ingenious. They were so,so...Our dorozhka stopped . We faced a big store window.The same store window...

MY COUSIN

Our coachman loudly announced our arrival awakening me from my thoughts. Like in a faraway dream I heard ; he asked us , " Isn't it Krutka # one?." " Yes, this is the one!". My mother answered faintly. We stepped out, paid the coachman's fee, then looked with emotion at the surroundings."Yes, this is Krutka # one, the same one, the same entrance, the same street".My thoughts full of emotion overcame me.It was the same big bowed window, the same door. Should we enter? And if, if someone else is there?.. Or if ... We have to face reality! We have to know who is now in this store! We are on the threshold of reality. I felt the same as if I had come to my own funeral.It was a strange sensation. Yes ,I was the same person born in Kalisz with the same identity, with the same heart and feelings , the same being ,but I responded very strangely at that moment of confronting a long time puzzled realness.I was numbed and prepared for something inevitable... and maybe too difficult to bear ... A strange suspicion nurtured my soul.I was so emotional that it was like being two different human beings that had separated from themselves . One part of me ...felt not like myself, completely numbed , the other.... waiting for a verdict. .My mother opened the store's door. The thin familiar sound of a bell, long forgotten, announced our entry at the store. We looked around. The store was in bad shape , very impoverished but in the same line of business . Someone

opened the adjacent back door .A handsome, blond young man of seventeen appeared. His big grey eyes looked at us, and automatically opened wide . We looked at each other with curiosity .Momentarily we couldn't recognize each other . But that was only for a moment .In a flash we hugged and cried." My God!" My cousin was screaming out from joy " You are alive!" After hugging ,kissing and admiring each other we finally confronted the truth. In my cousin's short version we found out with sadness and tears , that everyone from our family,... our friends ,...the entire town of Jews had perished. Everyone by different circumstances or in the crematoriums or faced other horrifying deaths. My mother sobbed horribly,but I froze. I couldn't cry .I took it like I was unconscious, like something unreal, like something I had vaguely knew, yet ready to face it someday.Bleak and blinded to everything with out feeling .I wasn't showing any of my emotions , confronting this information as a bad mirage based on the stories already told to me by the wounded Russian soldiers.Those were not stories- this was reality. To accept it ,it is another matter. I didn't dare believe that the whole world was so silent for so many years ! How much I knew it wasn't enough to face the affects of the facts . The authentic truth was striking... To be told about it ,is one thing ,but to realize what those people went through, no- one could even touch the surface. Listening to my cousin's stories I couldn't cry but,as the years go by now, I cried every day for this innocent people whose short lives were so abruptly cut off... When we went over the first phase of cruel

information, sharing sadness my cousin was still, full of incredible stories. He told us that after ,when we left Warsaw, the walls around the ghetto were erected high and life inside started be more and more unbearable. People were starving to death. They were dying in homes ,on sidewalks... everywhere. There was liquidations and deportations. Terror was everywhere.Hunger in the ghetto dangerously spread into everyone's homes. People started to rummage in garbage, looking for something "edible" like potatoes' peelings or old rotten carrots or old bones to lick them.Walking in streets they stumbled over stiffened , abandoned cadavers, passing them like a common hindrance. They didn't react anymore to the skeletons of dried out stiff bodies sticking out on the side walls and street gutters, wishing only - that they will not be in the same state, tomorrow. People lost their faith. God was to cruel to them.

Our family also starved. There weren't any more jobs available, therefore no more food was on the table . Many times he, as a small boy , like many youngsters, he also smuggled food through the ghetto walls, going through the holes dugout by the bare hands ,but that was extremely dangerous . Many times children were shot by the gendarmes for smuggling a few potatoes or pieces of old bread for their loved ones. It was so bad, that one day my older uncle took his youngest , precious little daughter by the hand, and went to give himself up into Germans hands. They never comeback... Everyday the Germans transported people from the ghetto, telling them

,that they were sending volunteers to work. Each cattle train was tightly loaded with human living bodies in packed cargo . Then... Then instead of a promised work hey were sent to concentration camps.They Separated siblings, taken fathers or mothers from their children , tearing family's apart or splitting them completely forcing them into different destinations ,dissecting their feelings and treating them like worthless animals. It didn't help crying ,sobbing and kissing boots covered with blood of the blood thirsty brigands. My family was separated the same as everyone else. At first, the German took the women, then... his older brother . The young boy four years older then him just had fell in love and wanted to get engaged..

He told us after that , misfortune followed him with his father. They were put on a train in a cattle wagon , like they always said to every- one" for work" but they were on their way- to be sent to a concentration camp in Germany; to be gassed . When the cattle wagon was loaded to the brim, they both were squeezed to the end of the wagon. Uncle had a chisel in his pocket. He started to chisel and shave the wood at the bottom of the wagon wall which didn't look too sturdy. He work indefatigably to the moment that he could make an opening. Then he told him(my cousin) to jump from the wagon. My cousin begged him to follow him ,but my uncle refused. He told him that he is to tall and to old to jump... you must do it... "It is risky " my uncle told him" you can be killed by a wrong jump or... by a German guard , but to go to a concentration camp was

to be destroyed without any hope. So it was better to jump. I want to give you a chance to be left a live". They waited when the train slightly slowed down on the curve and at that moment; his father had kissed him goodbye, reciting a blessing over him. He was pushed out by his father... He fell on the high slope then rolled down to a deep ditch and lost consciousness. He wasn't aware how long he stayed there, but when he awoke, it was dark. He took precautions to not to be seen. Then he walked for a few kilometers. He didn't know where he was. It was hardly day-break when out in the horizon, was an outlined of a small farm. His hunger was severe and the weariness and desperation that worked on him to such a degree that he didn't care anymore of any danger. He knocked at the door of this farmhouse. They were German farmers. In his broken language, hardly speaking German, he told them that he is a Pole, runaway from the Germans, sent to a labor camp (many Poles were sent to work inside Germany) He didn't dare tell them that he was a Jew. His blond hair with his light complexion and his light grey eyes were deceiving. They believed his story, promising him that they will not notify the authorities and he can live and work on the farm as long he wanted to. They are in deed in need of a spare hand to work. He stayed with them till the end of the war. When the war ended he came to Kalisz in false hope to find at least someone from the family... He was extremely thrilled to see us, as we were the only family he had left. He didn't let us go anywhere else but insisted to stay at his place. His parent's home was gone. The furniture disappeared,

robbed from everything..He rented someone else's apartment.Visiting his father's custodian ,he recognised many pieces of his parent's furniture but ,that nowwas so little of importance...With our own place was the same history. Our furniture was shared between our two neighbors . .. Our business machines were sent to Germany. We left with NOThING... We were glad to stay in his small apartment which he rented near his business.

The next day during my stay in my hometown, my cousin took me for a walk. I was so excited to be in my hometown again that I finished my breakfast on the run. My heart pounded with emotion. I was hungry to see the town of my youth which I dreamed of for a long time while I was away, in exile.

We paced the main street Pilsutski so familiar to me. Seldom people passed through this now. It used to be so busy with pedestrians. The displays in the windows of the stores were not the same as they were in the past. They were unappealing and lacked a professional touch to them and looked impoverished by the war and unskillful new owners, as before the war mostly Jews were in business. The Coffee Houses albeit the same, before were loaded with a variety of goodies and full of customers in their impeccable suits sitting down and sipping their coffee and reading "daily" newspapers. Now they were practically empty. We walked on slowly, without uttering a word. I turned to my cousin and expressed with sadness, "What happened to the town? Everything changed. Nothing was the same!" "It is so different, so cold, so strange, so ... Where are the people? Where is the life and the soul of this town?! On each corner of the streets use to be balloon peddlers. Where are they? This is already the end of 1945. The war is months over! Do you think that the people didn't return to their homes yet? (Many people fled Kalisz in the time of the occupation) It is

so depressing." He looked at me with his melancholic eyes and smiled bitterly "You are so right! It is very different. I wish to answer you more favorably, but I can't. Nobody else shall return anymore. Maybe only a handful of them will return. This is it. Half of the population of this town has perished forever into ashes, swept away by the winds from the surface of the earth". Then he blew into the palm of his hand, imitating the wind and turned his face away from me as to not reveal to me his emotion. After a short silence, he added; "Some Poles lost their lives too! The Germans killed off the Polish Intelligentsia also since they , feared that this group of people would present a great threat and danger for them . They eliminated every person who stood in their way, as they could represent problems for them in the future . And the biggest problem could come only from the educated ones in that they could become a powerful adversary to Hitler..They eliminated every person who stood in their way who posed as a possible future threat to the Nazi movement. Also just before the end of war many people from our town , the Volks Deutsches , fled to Germany , afraid surrendering to the liberators . They were frightened that they would have to pay the consequences for their actions. They knew they couldn't escape justice if they remained in the town as they fully cooperated with Nazy and were even more dedicated than the Germans themselves to Hitler .

" Come, I will show you something " he said half distressed and half in a sarcastic tone. Since the river Prosna

intersected the town in a few places ,all we had to do was to cross a small bridge on Pilsudski street, just before the town's library . As I stopped at this bridge I was struck with disbelief.Both sides of the river bank which had been inlayed with Jewish tombstones were dug up from the two Jewish graveyards. I stared at this awful act of insanity. Why? I thought to myself. I very well remember that both sides of this river bank used to be inlay with solid ,large cemented blocks which could withstand the many new generations to come. Why! Why on earth did they ever do this ? I kept repeating it to myself. The hatred was so profound that the taking of lives was not enough to satisfy their murderous appetite.They went even so far as to disturb the resting place of those already deceased. Seeing this incredulous sight I asked myself, "How much can one hate !... I guess hate has no limits... How wonderful life would be on this earth if we could only erase the word HATE from the dictionary . Then again , perhaps this remnant on the river Prosna shall serve as a monument depicting the past of " HATE " that existed , for the many new Polish generations to come , those who's ancestors were participants in drenching their hands with Jewish blood.It shall remind them of the innocent martyrs who once lived in this town who served Poland with their last drop of blood.Indeed,this keepsake is a remembrance of their behavior and attitude with their involvement in this or other cruel vicious persecutions, attacking defenseless prey like a " fun-game". I wish that , this monument will stay there forever as a memento of those

betrayed. A memento of their ancestor's involvement in helping the Germans haunt living Jews and also the dead ones."

"Come!" my cousin released my fingers which spasmodically gripped the bridge's balustrade." Don't be so weak, harden up. You have to face much more he told me. This is only minuscule(scratching the surface) of what has happened to the Jews . How will you face everything if you brood on every little detail.Get ready as today, you will confront many things which will be very painful.

You will also learn in a matter of a short time the horror from the people who survived this Hell ON EARTH , and their different experiences. Alas! Not to many of them survived , but ,it is enough to know what had happened..To face it and to cope with it, you can't let yourself be stirred up by your emotion. Come ,I will show you more", he said. When I turned toward the street I couldn't resist to say , " How little traffic is on the streets! How the business area collapsed! No, Kalisz wasn't the same!"...

I too changed.. .. Psychologically I absorbed as cold I could be but shortly I broke down. We approached a street crossing and to the left was the Jewish populated Zlota Street .It was such a busy street! That was the street where Jews sold the best herrings. I remember the smell of the herrings, barrels full of variety and... the women selling them.I remember the stores with fish , kosher poultry, fancy goods and books. On each street corner peddlers sold a type of twisted bagels made by hand ,(much thinner and tastier , larger and crispier, which doesn't

exist any longer in the whole world as far as I know) calling out to attract the customers;" three for ten! Still warm! Three for ten!..." Then there were peddlers selling combs, little mirrors and other small articles, calling out also for attention.

I could hear them even now. They were dressed in shabby clothes and shivered from the cold yet, happy to bring home a decent few pennies earned. They survived in my heart As a child I didn't realize the extent of people's poverty of the ghetto. The only exposure I got was only before our holidays when my mother would take me a few times to Zlota street with her, to shop. I was captivated with the business activities on the street. Now, it was all empty and strange. For a moment I thought that I was elsewhere . Is it possible that everyone is gone.... perished ,just like that? " I said as I snapped my fingers. " Yes ,but not just like that"...My cousin answered not willing to go into more of a conversation with me. It was too painful to speak.

On our left used to stand a big ,beautiful old building. That was a great central synagogue . The orthodox in their black garb were always around , particularly during the holidays. From every side of town there, people came to pray. It was like a pilgrimage from the whole town as, that was the only one orthodox synagogue in the city. We also had a second synagogue in the town , a new one on Krutka street which was conservative, but now it remained in ruins. I looked and looked around. "Where is the synagogue? I suppose it should be here! Am I hallucinating? " "No, you don't hallucinate," he said. "The

synagogue was burnt and leveled to the ground. Now in its place is erected "the addition to the town hall"

"What else did they do?" I asked. "Come, you will see" my cousin replied. We continued our promenade. There weren't any stores. In a short distance we approached the corner at our left. There used to be a small store packed with books; a school supply store. The store was always packed with youngsters and adults. The store was no longer there nor even its remains. To the right, at the big entry of a large brick house, was sort of a hall, which extended into a big court-yard, beset with long tables exposed with full of whole or cut poultry. The Jewish peddlers, mostly women, peddling their poultry, stopped people passing by them on the street near their stands, begging shoppers;" Madame, buy from me! Just fresh, just killed, please buy from me! I will cut the best part of it for you!" I remembered their annoying pleas so full of pain, the pain which only now I can understand... Now... There was not even a trace of this. Now only piercing silence rules, like the silence of a graveyard. Everything what was has now left but, only like a dream of my memory of what was in Kalisz...

We faced the intersection where Wodna street used to be. Before this used to be an narrow branch of the river Prosna which was bordered by a long row of old houses. All these houses were in the Jewish ghetto. Now this rivulet was filled with gravel, leveled, transformed into a grass island. The houses were leveled and replaced with a few new erected buildings. It is true, that

this place now looks much neater, modern, and immaculate, but cleaned of Jews! Finally Kalisz is uncontaminated, unpolluted, sterile, pure, wholesome and so Perfect in the mind of anti-semites! No more Wodna Street and no more vibrant Jewish community. Kalisz lost forever their scholars, progress and... PROSPERITY. (The Jewish population was a source of Kalisz's prosperity. Besides the Ghettos there was a wealthy and top notch educated milieu of Jews. Some of them who wore black garb and a long ringlets under their ethnic caps, and...wore beards, were scholars, butchers, goldsmiths, bakers, shoemakers, tailors, businessman and the flowers of the town.... intelligentsia....)

The greater of the two Jewish cemeteries was also leveled to the ground. The smaller new one, closer to the Gurnoslonska street was destructed to a such point, that no-one could find their beloved's resting place any more.

Now in this town their existence was erased. The dead nor the living weren't around anymore. Only the tombstones on the River Prosna will remain for those passer by to tell; that in this town were people of "The Moses faith" (that's how they called the Jews when they used formal language).

This first day in my hometown was very memorable. It was too much emotion which stirred me so to the bottom of my heart... What more can I face! What more?...

I walked on subdued. Both of us weren't in a talking mood. Near home I broke the silence. I was mad. I was shaking with

rage."I can't understand!... I just can't understand that young Jews so brave, who fought in the Polish army and who were so athletic, so strong and masculine let themselves get annihilated, without resisting!? No resistance, no fighting back?! Not even running?"... "Stop! Stop! Stop for a minute! Before your escaping from Kalisz don't you remember? what are you saying!" My cousin looked at me with pain. "Do you remember the time when you were in Poland? " "Yes "I shuddered. " 1940 was only a beginning. People never expected the Holocaust. Yes, the Germans already at this time showed their thirst for blood (killing people with sadism) but later... Nobody believed that in the end of the twentieth century, Europe would be ruled by degenerate sadists. It wasn't even possible to confront them as they gripped everyone with their terror. For the smallest of transgressions entire families paid with their lives. People didn't dare sacrifice their dearest... They were terrorized. Everyone knew their cruel tyranny. The Germans were so blood thirsty, that they only had to wait to have the opportunity to kill or mentally destroy someone! Many young men escaped joint the partysants but they were mostly killed by Poles. But, this time, unlike the Germans which had fought in World War 1 were different.. This time, their country " rulers" were a band of criminals, brigands and divergent. At the beginning their tactics was only to suppress and to stun the victims. I suppose that you remember that? You saw the bloody scenes!?... The other danger was also from the Poles. You remember how hateful they were? The Jewish people were completely exhausted and

drained from hiding .Hiding from Poles and hiding from the Germans.

Then they approached them with lies, cunningness, tricks and of course - terror...and again the terror , crafting artificial jobs in which we had to lay our trust into them ! And they were good with that! About the crematoriums we didn't even know they existed.No information could leaked out about the atrocious acts ,as they finished the victims off right to the last one. No one could escape and if something like that occurred?... at that time, the one who did hide, was many times sniffed out by German dogs too. We didn't know! We didn't know what was happening right up to the last minute! We didn't know what happened to the previous transports! And when we finally found out ...It was too late...

Can you imagine telling the masses; men, women and children to striped naked and go into a shower,and instead ... gas them! Millions were collected in the cattle wagons sent to Vaivara,Plaszow,Mauthausen, Gross Rosen,Dora,Niederhagen,Bergen Belsen, Nenengamne, Westerbork, Herzogenbush, Mechelen,Buchenwald,Flossenbuerg,Dachau,Natzweiler,Drancy,Gurs... to be burned in the ovens of Treblinka, Chelmno,Sobobor,Majdanek,Belzec,and Aushwitz-Birkenau.

How can I tell you in one blink of a second, what happened?! Everyone was terrorized . After Kalisz was cleaned of Jews , they started to assault the Polish too .(A Polish proverb say;"Kto pod kim dolki kopie, ten sam w nie wpada" in translation; " Who digs pits under someone , falls into it

himself.") They couldn't save themselves either. They paid for that which they did, thinking that they would be spared. Of course the Poles didn't suffer to the degree as the Jews did . The Jews were used as scapegoats. The Polish people had looked for acceptance in the eyes of the Germans at the expense of this helpless people ; people which the Polish people betrayed, people which shed their blood together with them in many battles for their country. They betrayed their own Lord Jesus who preached so mindful as : "Love thy neighbor as you love yourself". If the Poles did not collaborate with the Nazis many of those victims would have been saved.

Take it slowly , you will learn! Tomorrow will be another day . It is too much to absorb in one day... It is also too painful..." My cousin stated.

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SORROWFUL NEWS ABOUT ALA

chapter 45

Kalisz as a town district was selected to create the Jewish committee subsidized by the Jews of America as a helping hand for these people which had survived the war. Not too many Kaliszien Jews survived, (I will say that those who survived could be counted on my fingers) but after the postwar a small group of Jews freed from concentration camps leaving before the war in neighboring small towns or villagers concentrated into Kalisz. The reason for this was that they needed the committee's financial support and protection. Those Jews fearing anti-semitic behavior from Polish people were always on guard. It was much safer to stick together with the rest of their own kind. This center was established in the house of Mr. Adler a Jewish victim. The hole big flat was to the disposition of the center, even the kitchen, where , every single day hearty dinners were prepared for everyone who came. The very needy received clothing and money to help them make their first steps to live in freedom. Every Jewish people with no exceptions had come to this center for many different reasons . Everyone needed help; either for moral support or for food ,either money or information, hoping to find , if maybe... by any chance,... someone dear will show up...

There was also sponsored by the O.R.T. organization a possibility at the center's facility (in one room) to learn a profession , for the people whose young lives were

the transport.They were the only family she had there. Just before liberation!

I was listening to many, many horror stories.

A woman also from our vicinity , told me how she survived under the corps of gassed people...

Everyone who cameback from concentration camps showed me their arms branded with their numbers marked like cattle.

They told me about the painful moments when mothers, children, husbands, wives, fathers , separated by the gendarmes and the Gestapo.They told me about their screams like wounded animals... How they wept ,begged....so helplessly...

They told me about their lives in the concentration camps, their bodies on crowded wooden platforms, where they slept, covered with lice and the scabs that came from lice eaten bodies. People were dried up to their bones from starvation. They were deprived of proper covers, linen, proper clothing,in the cold, with no medicine and forced to work to their last moment of their life.Everyday the dead were picked up by the dozens from barracks or working places. They were sick and terrorized, many couldn't hold out this terror , throwing themselves onto electric wires. They told me how Jews(forced by guns) executed the horrible function of placing gassed people into the crematoriums ovens.Frequently they recognized the corps of their beloved one's in the burning pails, ending their own live's by throwing themselves into the flames in their despair.

They told me about the mountains of human hair ,Gold dentures, 2eye-glasses,shoes.... The production of soap made from people. About the lamp shades made... from human skin....

They told me about the Warsaw ghetto.How in despair people committed suicide by throwing themselves from high windows or balconies . They told me about the uprising Warsaw ghetto and its sad, mournful heroic ending; when the ghetto was burning many Poles stood from afar and laughed , saying; Zydy i pluskwy palon sie "The Jews and the bed-bags are burning"....

They told me about so many horrors and tragedies with no ending...

The stories of the partisans hiding in the woods and their involvements and the German massacrers... Sometime Jewish partisans were massacred by the Polish people.

They told me about the life of the " more fortunate" ' the Jews who carried Aryan papers.How they waited behind their door of their home listening to every noise made and hearing everyone's steps, thinking with anxiety that now- maybe this will be their end... Or...that someone will finally denounce them and they will be taken away... They were in constant panic riding in busses , tramway or walking on the streets; scared to death that someone, somehow will recognize them as a Jew. The stories were so inhumane and so barbaric that it was hard to believe that it actually happened.What kind of a person could open the scalp of a child, smashing its head against a pole?... in the presence of it's own mother..? Is it normal that the Nazis entertained themselves with disgraceful games,such as

forcing older victims to crawl on all fours carrying the young and strongest ones to ride upon the older victim's back using them as horses; those who had nearly collapsed from hunger and exhaustion ?

They told me about the executions and hangings.

They told me about the disgraceful medical experiments that made me shiver even up till now , after so many years later.

They told me endless stories.....

They also told me that some Poles were also different. Some endangered their own lives to save a Jew. But these were an insignificant amount, since many of them , if they did it, did it for big money. The churches also saved a number of Jewish children . Some from the goodness of their hearts, but, that was also minimal. Their heroic acts were mostly made due to a different nature. They were inspired by their religious instinct - to convert any Jewish child to Christianity. That was a sacred act to convert "a lost soul"... As in this turbulence of horror some Jewish mothers left their new born children at the mercy of non-Jews to have their lives spared.

One day I saw a group of children at the center who had been saved by those Christians. The majority of them were between the age of 3 to 10. As the parents of those children who were given up for adoption perished, after post war their families from abroad ,if they had some information, had requested their lost one's offsprings. Seeing these small crying children , watching them so confused was very painful. It was a heartbreaking picture. They were lost, flustered and so

helpless. For them it was too difficult to understand that they
2222are connected to someone else... They were so innocent and
young. It was difficult for them to comprehend and accept that
the people which took care of them... were not their real
parents... And the most painful of all was to make them
understand that their parents perished. Can you tell a small
child that he will never know their real parents and that their
remains - are only ashes spread in some unknown place ,
dumped from the crematoriums as fertilizer ?. They were informed
that they now had to go to their relatives , alien to them,
located overseas, departing from those which they had
considered to be their own parents . It was so depressing to see
them ...so confused . They too also paid their fair share...
They too were also victims of this cruel war...

In the beginning of January 1946 my father returned home. His first stop returning to his hometown was to drop into "the" store at Krutka street, just like my mother and I previously did, wondering and hoping that someone there would be able to direct him to us. He was trying to predict my mother's first move, being her brother's store. His instinct was pushing him in to this direction. It just so happened that my mother and I was at the store one day. As my father opened the door to the store, my mother jumped with a frantic scream of joy. I was in shock and I can't recall my reaction seeing my father after so many years. We were finally together. Then, shortly after his arrival, my manipulative cousin which was with me in the Soviet Union also returned to Krotka street. She was all alone, in a deplorable condition. Her shoes fell off from her feet so she finished her journey by carrying them in her hands. From the four of them (my two aunts, uncle and her) only she survived from the Typhoid epidemic, which didn't spare my two aunts and uncle. She stayed with us and I shared everything with her...

everyday I visited the Committee and listened to so many different ill - fated stories. It isn't possible to cover every story. Every one's was dreadful. There, every day someone who visited, shared their own experiences from the occupation. I wanted to do something helpful as my heart was wounded. Especially being tormented by the issue of the children, left in strange

hand who will never know of their heritage. These children would never know who they really were, as many of their parents perished and with them perished their family history. That distress influenced me to volunteer in one of the rescue missions. One day my father received a letter from Australia. A man, just before the war started, he emigrated from Kalisz to Australia. Finding out somehow, through someone that, my father returned to his home town, he wrote to him pleading with him, to get in touch with a pharmacist who lived in a small town of Turek, close to Kalisz. At troubled times, the Australian's sister gave away her infant girl to one of the local pharmacists, paying him a large sum of money. The Australian wrote only that he was looking for his sister's child, as she herself had perished in this cyclone of war. My father was reluctant to interfere in that issue, as the information was insufficient. Ardently I insisted, that I will look for this child. I volunteered with a heated flare of inspiration, not realizing my own danger. I took a bus to this tiny town of Turek. Walking on the town's pavement (there weren't any sidewalks) for some reason, I felt uncomfortable. People seldom passed me by but looked at me with strange curiosity and suspiciousness. That finally made me lose my certitude leaving me insecure. Constrained, I probably developed paranoia for this mission. I was under the impression that someone, somewhere was lurking behind me. I could feel the piercing looks, penetrating throughout my entire body and I was tense. I knew my appearance was a far cry to look like a Semitic person, but

unconsciously I felt the same way ; the horror of those Jews hiding in the time of the war(of course in a small manner). Could it be that I was new in this town and because of that my unfamiliar looks attracted curious onlookers... or was it something else?. For some reason I didn't feel safe.I shivered from fright developing a cold sweat. Momentarily, I panicked and regretted my enterprise, but then I overcame my uneasiness being near the pharmacist's house,trying to control myself. Having doubts and anxieties I rang the bell. I could feel the strong beating of my heart which jumped .Introducing myself to the people who I visited, I explained the reason of my calling. The reception I received from the pharmacist's family was cold , starchy and unpleasant. I was scrutinized by them with eyes that stared at me fiercely. Then the pharmacist with a chilly voice informed me that they don't know of such an occurrence and had presented their four children to me in order that I may see which one it was I was referring to.I personally couldn't tell the difference . They seemed to all belong to the same family -theirs. After this display they turned a cold shoulder to me .The truth was that I didn't even know the parents of this child! The information which was supplied to me was not enough to further have a discussion with these people. This was a sad and emotional experience of n unexperienced idealistic young adult.I returned home only shaken up from the unpleasant situation ,leaving this matter in the hands of experts . Unfortunately, many times even the experts couldn't help this kind of complicated and intricate position.

I was just as helpless as Don Xiote in his quest for a heroic destiny. As , I too lost faith in people and became a prisoner of Hell, trying to pursue a goal.

DISAPPOINTMENTS

chapter

Many unpleasant events occurred after the end of the war. One of it in July 1946, nearly two hundred Jews come back from the Soviet Union and concentration camps to the town of Kelce. Altogether there two hundred of them, happy to survive the Holocaust, alas! were viciously attacked by the Poles. One day just before the pogrom Polish police checked every Jewish home for the weapons to be confiscate. The next day was organized pogrom. The pogrom was an impetus and due to that at least 42 men, women and children survivors of Holocaust arriving in Kelce in broad day light were murdered by Poles with police approval. In additional 30 more people arriving on the afternoon trains were also killed. A nine year old Gentile boy was missing for three days from the town. Polle claimed that Jews killed him and use his blood to make Mace. After three days the boy appeared at the police station. Every thing was a lie but that instigated enraged crowd making a nother pogrom and of that other 40 or more Jews were beaten with crowbars. Jewish children were thrown from windows, pregnant women had their bellis ripped open. 50 people were also injured then massacred in hospital. This pogrom were organized long time by National Armed Forces. This was only one incident as it was mor of it. After the cruel and sadistic German occupancy, which rest of living survivors strip from every thing; like their loved ones, their property, health and ordinary joy for life. This pogrom was a big blow to all Jewish population and after that mostly left Poland. Now, we had

mourned not only the victims of war ,but the people of Kelce...
THE AFTER WAR VICTIMS...This viciousness affected all of us
tremendously and horrified everyone of us. The awful awe had
struck each of us without limit. How sad it was an how paradox
it was . The victims of the pogrom had left only with their
lives, life which they nurtured with their last breath which was
left in them during the six years of misery."The g lucky one".
They were eagerly waiting to survive in concentration camps,
looking like skeletons only, to be liberated... then to be
massacred. To be killed at the hands of their countryman...
Isn't it a irony of their fate?...

At first, my cousin decided to leave Poland . When we said
goodby , he stated to me ,"I have come to conclusion that this
country is not my country and never was. It is enough for me
that my ancestors lived in hostility and were never truly have
been accepted as a citizen should be .Yes, they were citizens
only for their money , big taxes. A special taxes for Jewish
businesses. This isn't my country anymore ,hi said.This is a
country that will always hate me! A country which will consider
me a second class citizen no matter what my education is and
no matter what I look like , as long as you would accept
their RELIGION ! " He left Poland with bitterness.

The atmosphere in Kalisz for the Jews wasn't at all
comfortable.Who still remained there, tense and eager to leave.

The time I spent in Kalisz I was befriended with a group of

young Polish students. Most of them studied at the University of Krakow. We met only when they had their vacation or their holidays which they spent in Kalisz. In our free days, we got together; joking, laughing and discussing many events. They were trying to dissuade my accusations, being very nice towards me, accepting me with respect. I even had a marriage proposal from a very brilliant mathematics student. But I refused him. I felt there would be a barrier that would separate me forever from my Jewish people. I couldn't feel good even with my friends. After this facts I couldn't never trust a Poll it not matter how sincerely he was.

A poem from Yehuda Amichai's was well describes my feelings.

" Half the people love,

Half the people hate.

And where is my place between

these halves

That are so well matched?"....

After the Kelce incident and after having listened to my peoples' sufferings, I felt angry, betrayed and had only a tasteless opinion about my beloved country. My pure patriotic feeling deserted me. I was enraged at the whole so call "civilized" world. Something in me regenerated. At the same time I ejected my inferiority complex which from my early age was "wishy-washy". I was absolutely free from any doubts that a Jew is not worse than others. That what so disturbed me in the past, now brought me in to the reality that Poland was uncivil and ungrateful country. I stopped making homage to Polish pathos and their artificial sly phoniness. I was a reborn Jew, sharing the endless suffering with the rest of the survivors and mourned of the six millions Holocaust martyrs. Finally my parents and I had made decision. We went to live this country. Apart from the fact that I am not a practicing Jew I will never abandon my religion -just to be accepted by government and society. I am what I am and I will never surrender. How much I loved my country I actually reversed my filing....My wound will never heal. It is to dept in my heart as it is of the heart of the rest of every survivors.

And for the last time I walked the streets of Kalisz. I came to the front of my school building. I stood there and I looked at it. It was empty, abandoned yet surprisingly intact, like an erected monument of extinguished lives. Lives of children, young women and men, the future pride which could have been so important to the society. Now, it was standing silent, only keeping horrible secrets of humanity. Secrets of tortures performed at the innocents. Even so, as many books have been written and many witnesses reviled horrible unbelievable macabre performed by the Germans' it is not enough to ever know every individual act of horror and their annihilation. How sad it was for me never to be able to hear this vibration and noisy chirping and singing of my peers which were during the time of school-recess. I remember it sounded as big invasion of bees. How many children could have been saved if Christians' eagerness will be not so great to collaborate with Nazi.

Poland finally was cleaned out from the "Parasites" that have they called Jews! How perfectly satisfied the Poles must be now!

Wondering through the streets I headed towards the park, Kalisziens' proud. It was really to be admired. The river Prosna also winded to the right side of the park so to enter to this park it was not other way than to cross a small wooden

bridge. At this entrance Polish peddlers were selling the thin, round wafers so call "Andruty". No Jewish peddlers were allowed selling their goods at this entrance. I stopped in the middle of this bridge bending from railing to watch the river. My memories transported me back to the happy moments in my life. I recalled when in the summer time, at the very same bridge, with excitement I watched regatta and other activity on the river. I remembered how the rows, of slender, long, beautiful, light-brown elegant shiny canoes, fill with young athletes, slide under this bridge. They were zooming by rhythmically movement of oars, encouraged by a loud captain's voice which yelled through a cone; go, go, faster, faster, faster! One, one, one, one, faster!... faster! His voice had carrying through enter park. A Jew couldn't belong to any of these clubs. They were excluded. Even some clubs had a singe "The dogs and the Jews are not permitted". Later, on a small scrap of river bank they formed their own club "K.W.30". But the fee was too high for common one to joint it. Shortly before the war the Jews established across the "K.W.30" an new club so call "Maccabees". There weren't any activity of regatta, but there, we could rent a canoe. I remembered the time when I canoed with my parents and also by myself. It was just before the war... and now it seemed to me like yesterday- but it wasn't, that was so long ago. Looking into the water, on my right I saw in the reflection of a beautiful theatrical structure which was standing on the edge of the river bank in a background of a smaller part of park which was across the river. Mussing on this bridge I also

recollected my pleasant winter time. When the river was solid frozen this particulate place was use for ice skating. The fee was minimal . I remembered my self as I was in that very place ice-skating to the music of classic waltzes, played loudly on a record player. Sometime I could join long lines looking like a twined snake , hang at the end of it with a wild pleasure , laughing and screaming joyfully. Adjacent to the ice skating ring, side of the brink, for winter time only, a shack was built there for this winter recreation. There people would come to warm up , relax or buy refreshments; like hot cocoa ,candy , oranges or old fashioned donuts and etcetera. On Sundays my parents would come to the river, and stood at that bridge to watch their only one offspring, it's mean me.

I awoke from this pleasantly-biter reflection to the reality and slowly ambled inside park, continuing my promenade on the river's large embankment . The pat on embankment was very wide as every paths in this park. Before reaching the end of the park-embarkment on my right was a pat to the station were I and my class peers performed dances at each end of the school season. On the near left, down from embarkment was a long chestnut trees alley which continued up to the end of the other park-exit. In the springtime my parents and I use to stroll there under complete shadow of this chestnuts branches dressed in dense large leaves holding enormous quantity of white flowers looking like candles. In the early summer they produced small, green and prickly baby chestnuts which had fall in abundance under the trees. Children apply them to made a toys using their

imagination .They connected each prickly ball with a wooden matches. In the autumn to everyone's enjoyment, the chestnuts turned glossy brown with an imperfect white center. They would fall to the ground ,sinking sparingly on the grass and path or... simply land on your head, making us laugh. How many children were there ! How many noises stretched through this park echoing and mixing with other noises!

Now,there was only a grave silence...

I returned back through this allay which lead me to a place so call "Kogutek"(Rouster). There, in the middle of a big area was manmade lake and in the middle of this lake was a tiny island covered with grass and small bushes were was nested a tiny shed.A group of the beautiful white swans and a black one , once used to swim ,proudly circulating the lake.

I didn't saw them anymore. They weren't there.

Nor weren't any longer the canoes, rented out by young people for extravagance of flowing around the lake with there friends or beloved one. This lake was surrounded by a large walking path with the background of many benches .Especially during the Jewish holidays they were full of people resting and enjoying greenery and air.The benches were so crowded that sometimes it was difficult to get a seat.

Now, they were empty. And the emptiness was also in my heart... And, above all around me was such grief and sorrow in searching for these kind of moments which will never, never comeback...

Dipper, to my left was a rose garden and a brick greenhouse

building. The whole layout was almost symmetrical . In the middle the "Oranzerja" (the green house area), at on the on of it pat was a sundial on a cemented base with Romans numerals . Being a very young child I always climbed upon . It was surrounded by an iron balustrade I use to study hours. A short distance away there was also another round flower bed with a statue of a woman encircle by a fountain. Probably every town- folk took their pictures there.

Now - it was deserted...

A painful silence was dominated there! I shrugged and I walk away .Finally I paid my last visit to the ruins of the ancient small fortress or may by ruins of a little castle .I wasn't to familiar with its history but was very much familiar with its steps on which I running up and down ,playing " Hide and Seek" with my friends. I sat on the bench near the ruins and tears started to flow as I remember me running and laughing, care-free with my peers ,exploring the well preserved remains. The ruins were surrounded by well kept green grass, old trees well preserved constantly surveyed by the officer -guardian. At that time the smallest of littering was fined .Everything was so perfect.

Sitting on the bench under old tree beneath abundant coronet of superior leaves as sun was going through I was warmed pleasantly.The smell of fresh cut grass was in the air.But no-one was there.Only birds warbled and a pleasant breeze was playing with the leaves. I waited a long time for someone to come , to pass by ,but useless .

My thought run back into the hunted memory, remembering my early school years .What a bitter memories had been engraved in to my sensitive young heart. Years ago I lived on Gornoslonska street . My parents sent me to private Jewish kindergarten, not for religious purposes but for comfort and the good education. This kindergarten was followed by elementary classes also to come . Unfortunately I couldn't continue my elementary school years since this school was dissolved.The owner-manager emigrated from Poland. The easiest thing to do for my parents was to send me to "Repana" a public school as that was near our house. It was a big grey brick building Repana school which was a state school . I was interviewed by school official and placed into the second grade, against my parents will and my own.I never went into the first grade. My education was only kindergarten. Nevertheless they found me too knowledgeable for the first grade. "It would be destructive to the class " they said to my mother; " It is up to you , we can't keep her here in the first grade".They went to discourage us because we were Jews and a very few Jewish children were admitted to this school. It was very difficult for me to keep up with the second grade. There, we were only two Jews in the class. My biblical name was Ester ,but everyone at home called me Edzia as that sounded less harsh to the non- Jewish ears. Poles hated biblical names and would make fun of them, as they were only Jews. But to have a Christian sounding name , that was another story. The church from over a thousand years,approximatively from the time of 13 century or earlier had worked against Jewish

assimilation. They accepted only conversion .The only way to distinguish Jews from Catholics(as the Jewish features were mostly without racial characteristics) was to establish a law of distinction, where the birth certificate for the newborn could be obtained only on the basis of the baptism, it mente by the church.on the other hand the Jews have their ritual and formality performed by a Rabbi.By Jewish law the name was of course in hebrew, so the newborns had to stick to a biblical name.These records were helping in recognizing faith the newborn. And also a Hebrew name made an easier target for anti-Semitic purposes. .As a result of non acceptance a small fact, as my name Edza was too much for my teacher's sensitive ear, she herself, changed my name " cosmetically" to Edwarda." Edwarda Laszczewska, its sounds so much better!" she told me coldly . But Edwarda or Edzia had a very troubled life at this so "Proper School". The pure Polish name and my Slavic future didn't help me avoid degradation. I was a Jew and Jew had to be abase, humiliated and abuse! So I was pushed and was derided and beat up and frequently,being the object of spit . My two tresses were woven with ribbons and was tied at the ends with two bows. They were in constant attack by my classmates and every day I was called a dirty Jew when I walked home.My mother was fanatical in dressing me up ,always in impeccable. The starchy dresses, squeaky clean, couldn't prevent the constant humiliation , particularly by two girls : Jadza Jagodzinska and Janka Jakubowska. I was so miserable that I started to hated myself. I hated everything what was Jewish. I

wasn't comfortable with myself, especially to see on the streets a man wearing an ethnic garb, so I'd run across the street to not face him. I felt that I was dirty no matter how clean was I. I hated every Jews in the world. I was ashamed of my heritage. My wonderful and rich heritage! How horrible was it!... They conditioned me to be ashamed. Ashamed of what? of a cradle of many religions ! Of my own people?! This memories were painful...

Later we moved to another part of town ,to Pulawska street and my parents sent me to a Jewish privet school were I had finished my elementary education and just before the war I was accepted to the Jewish privet High school which was connected with my elementary division sheering the same building. This schools' curriculum was accepted by the country's board of education(not every Jewish school was accepted...) and that was only one Jewish High school in town.

I found my identity but only at the school. In the outside world...it was difference ,it wasn't the same.

After the war and years of humiliation my emotion had suddenly taken a turn . I changed my view, educating myself as much as I could possibly in my Jewish heritage. Finally I was proud that I was a Jew. That what was in the past in my childhood it happened that I was a victim of anti- Semitism and unfortunately... I was too young to comprehend and eager to be accepted by everyone...

The last strong blinding sun's rays were caressing my face. My

reflection were full of pain .After a moment I said out loud;

" My dear Poland, I had loved you with my young patriotic feelings,you didn't love me back! You didn't want me! You condemn me!"

Absorbed deeply in my thoughts like in a bad dream I awakened from this unpleasant recollection.Leaving the bench with heart full of distress,hurt to the dept of my soul I looked at the ruins for the last time .For the last time I quickly grasp the whole view of the park were I had spent many pleasant care-free years and I asked whisper; Where are my playmates? No- one has comeback ! No one! Were are our dreams?! I glimpsed at the river, as I walked by, to the exit, remembering my first swimming lessons. How empty was my heart. Yes ,my beloved country committed a crime towards the Jews.They committed a crime towards me. They worked hand and hand with the Germans helping them murder with their cruelty and lack of mercy. How can I remain in Poland having those memories which were both; cruel and unforgettable? What will remain of us if we will remind in Poland? A tragedy ?! No! No more . No more is Poland my beloved country! I don't belong here.

I headed towards exit and I murmured;"Goodby , I will never see you again! Goodby Kalisz...Goodby my hometown,... my unfulfilled dreams! I would not see you again. My father fought for you only to lose his eye ,but many Jews gave their lives for you like Berek Joselewicz and so many others.... But I... I despise you ! I am the new generation which will be never pushed around! I want to live with dignity and be proud of my new

country! and also for the liberty of my future generations."

End

